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WHEN POLLY WAS EIGHTEEN

BY

EMMA C. DOWD

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TO MY FRIEND

JULIA DARLING PECK

IN HAPPY MEMORY OF

SHELBURNE SUMMERS

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WHEN POLLY WAS EIGHTEEN

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CHAPTER I

"WHY DON'T YOU LAUGH?"

POLLY leaned back against the great oak, her eyes bent on David's face. She wondered — and wondered hard. If she could only fathom that inscrutable expression!

The young man, stretched on the grass among the waving shadows, was gazing across the valley to the hills in their soft afternoon veiling. It was a June picture beautiful enough to hold the attention of any one, yet it was plain that David's thoughts were not on the landscape.

They had come out for a walk, which had led them miles to the south and finally to the top of Chimney Hill, where they had stopped to rest.

At the start David had been talkative enough, in fact unusually merry; then, from no discernible cause, his lips had shut gravely and Polly had not been able to draw out more than monosyllables and short, matter-of-fact sentences. As she watched the unreadable face she tried to guess what the trouble might be. As in the old days before college, her lover had his occasional jealous

moods, and although they were less frequent they grew more and more bitter. Still, during the happy intervals Polly would coax herself to believe that they were past forever. Now she thought over the route, bit by bit, trying to find something which could have disturbed him. At last, baffled in her endeavors, she ventured suddenly: —

"David, why don't you laugh?"

He turned instantly. "At what?"

"Anything — nothing," she answered lightly. "You seemed to be weighing some heavy matter."

"No, I was only — " He halted, then went on without completing his sentence. "I am going away to-morrow," he announced.

Polly's smile vanished in surprise.

"Where?" she asked with her usual eagerness. "Spitzbergen or the South Pole?"

David did not appear to notice her pleasantry.

"To the Adirondacks," he said simply.

"Oh!" Polly exclaimed. "Were you just making up your mind?"

David reddened. "N-no," he denied; "but Converse invited me only a day or two ago, and I did n't decide at once."

"Going with Child Converse?" queried Polly's lips, while her thoughts ran along, "Why did n't he tell me sooner? We were together all yesterday morning and this afternoon — never a word until now!"

"Yes," David was saying, "he is going to take

me up to their camp. His father and mother are in Seattle, you know."

"M-h'm," she bowed. "How long you going to stay?"

"I don't know. He has n't set any time."

"It'll be great, won't it?" Polly smiled in her friendliest way.

He nodded gravely, slipping abruptly into complaint.

"You do not like Converse. You have never taken the trouble to know him."

The girl's eyes twinkled. "I certainly ought to adore him," she said; "it is the first time you ever wanted me to look at any boy except Your Royal Highness."

"Oh, you don't understand!" sighed David.

"I am always wondering," Polly went on, a tiny scowl wrinkling her smooth forehead, "how it is that Converse happens to attract you."

"He is a good fellow," said David positively. "But he has no stock of prittle-prattle."

"It is n't his lack of nonsense," Polly smiled. "He is too pretty. That combined with his name — but he can't help either, poor boy! Anyway, he looks like a nice baby — "

"Baby!" sniffed David.

"Well, he does. With his round face and rosy cheeks and curly hair — honestly, I always want to take him on my knee and trot him."

David laughed, though as if against his will.

"There's nothing of the baby about him," he asserted, "and a fellow can't help his looks."

Polly shook her head. "No," she agreed. "If only he and his sister could exchange faces! Maybe, after all, it is she that flavors my opinion of him."

"Marietta?"

"Yes." She was making little jabs in the soft moss with her slender forefinger, and a faint smile began to curve her lips.

"She is a brainy girl," was the somewhat stiff response, "and she has always been very pleasant to me."

"She is brainy enough," replied Polly; "the trouble is, she knows it and she shows that she knows it."

"If she did not know it, there would be nothing to know," said David severely.

Polly's smile broadened. "I was thinking," she resumed, "of what Patricia said the other day. Marietta has just been elected president of the Much Ado Club in place of Ruth Mansfield. You know the Mansfields are going to live in California. Ruth has grown pretty stout, and Marietta looks as if she would blow away. Somebody was wondering if she could fill Ruth's place, and Patricia said very soberly, 'I think she'll wabble about a little.' Was n't that bright?"

"Unkind," he answered forbiddingly.

"Oh, David!" she sighed, "you are so matter-of-fact. You don't like Patty any better than ever."

"There is not much of her to like," he said quietly.

"David Collins!"

"It is true."

"Every one but you thinks she is lovely," asserted Polly.

"Probably they don't require depth."

"Patricia is n't shallow," she retorted.

"It appears so to an outsider. Look at her and her gang!"

"Gang! — David!"

He gave a short laugh.

"The truth is, Polly, seeing we are talking plainly, I don't like the girls with whom you are so popular — the girls that have made you their queen. They — "

"Queen! What are you talking about, David?" Polly broke in without ceremony. Her voice was scornful.

"Yes, queen," reiterated the young man. "Only they rule you, not you them."

"You don't like it because I said yesterday I had n't time to have a flower garden," accused Polly.

"No," denied David, "I was thinking of something else. You have too many clubs on your hands."

"They don't amount to much in the way of time," returned Polly.

"They must be a great bore."

"No; they keep me out of a rut, put me in touch with everything."

"H'm!" scorned David. "I am glad I don't need a posse of chattering girls to keep me up to date. Not a single club for me in vacation! Cut them out, Polly, every one! Why not?"

The girl laughed. "What a queer fellow you are! I'll write to you every day if you wish," she added with seeming irrelevance, remembering a certain request when they had separated at the beginning of the last college year.

David brightened perceptibly — until a sparkle of fun in her brown eyes swiftly altered his expression.

"Yes, you will have as much as three minutes a day to give to me, won't you!" he flashed, a tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"No, truly, David, I am in earnest," smiled Polly. "My clubs don't take up nearly as much of my time as you think. If you would join some of them — the College, for instance — you would change your mind. You stand outside and criticize; you don't get the right viewpoint. Try it, David! You won't be sorry. I'll propose your name at the next meeting."

"No, you will not!" was the prompt reply. "Nice time to join, while I am off in an Adirondack camp."

"Oh, well, you are not going to stay all summer, are you?"

"I may."

Polly looked straight into the blue eyes opposite. "Do you mean it?"

He bowed gravely. "It is more than possible." He pulled out his watch. "Time we were on the march," he said, springing to his feet.

The walk home was like many another walk. Polly tried to make talk, with poor results. There were long silences, while she, watching her companion's face, longed with all her heart to read what was being written behind those unreadable eyes. She felt a relief when the hospital was sighted.

"You'll be up in the morning, shan't you?" she asked.

"I think there will not be time," David answered quietly. "Converse wishes to make an early start. I would better say good-bye now." He took her hand in his strong grasp, held it a moment as if words were not ready, then said calmly, "I hope you will have a pleasant summer."

"Just as if I were some ordinary acquaintance he had met on the street," Polly told herself in the seclusion of her own room. "What does ail him!"

CHAPTER II

THE LETTER

THE City Hall clock struck twelve, and Polly Dudley was still awake. The circumstances of the afternoon were passing before her. What David had said and what she had said, when he had laughed and when he had been silent, what they had seen on the way — it was all there in the procession that had no end. Just now they were at the corner of Webster Street, where it joined Clayton Avenue. An Italian boy with a push-cart was on the cross-walk, and Polly and David waited to let him pass. A young man was coming towards them, a handsome young man in a shining car. Now he was lifting his hat with his usual splendid smile, the smile that showed his gleaming, perfect teeth —

"Oh!" Polly breathed suddenly, "that was it! Now I know! How could he be so silly! But it was! It is always some such little thing."

At last she had discovered the direct cause of her lover's changed mood. She remembered how brilliantly Russell Ely had smiled to her as he passed, and then until this moment she had forgotten him altogether. Did n't David want her even to bow to any one! But Russell was a member of the College Club! This explained everything.

It seemed hours before sleep came to halt the wearying thoughts.

Polly was called from breakfast to greet David.

"We are not going to start as early as I expected," he said, "not before nine. So I thought I would — just run up and say good-morning." He smiled in almost his own cordial way.

The girl beamed up at him. She never harbored a pique, and now she began to chat as gayly as usual, in seeming forgetfulness of yesterday.

David, however, could not so lightly throw off the past. Recollections lingered to hamper his actions and retard his tongue. But he let his eyes rest upon Polly in gratification, laughing at her little pleasantries, and finally enjoying the present quite as if nothing in past or future could have any evil power for him. The parting was vastly different from that of the day before.

After he had gone Polly ran upstairs humming a song. How glad she was that he had come!

The days seemed long without David. Since they returned from college they had been much together, and now she missed him. The Randolphs were away, and Patricia and the rest could not quite fill the gap. The ladies of June Holiday Home always welcomed her with delight, and she called there occasionally; but their increased freedom of action carried them out-of-doors more than formerly, and she was apt not to find those at home whom she most wished to see. Then, too,

the place had never seemed just the same since her beloved "Nita" had left it forever.

She was returning, one afternoon, from a shopping excursion with Leonora, when she was overtaken by Russell Ely. He drove up to the curb, and threw open the door of his car.

"Will you ride up the hill?" he asked.

In a moment she was whirling along the shady avenue, arranging her bundles comfortably in her lap and listening to her companion's bright talk.

"This is a pleasant lift for me," she said. "I have been round in the shops ever since luncheon, and I am tired."

"I should n't have dared to ask you if that guardsman of yours were in town; but since the length of New England is between us I thought I might venture."

Polly laughed, and they talked on and on, until she noticed that they had not turned at the corner nearest home.

"You don't mind going a little farther, do you?" he asked. "I seldom get a glimpse of you nowadays. What do you say to running up to Castleboro Inn for some toast and tea? The air is just right for a drive."

But Polly refused, although the invitation became urgent; so the young man reluctantly left her at the hospital entrance.

"What would David say?" raced through her

head and would not stop. "What would David say? What would David say?"

"He won't know it!" Polly retorted. "And it's all right if he should."

"What would David say? What would David say?"

Polly went indoors and made herself ready for dinner.

"What would David say? What would David say?" accompanied her upstairs and down, and even to the dining-room door. Once at the table in the presence of her father and mother, the teasing voice vanished. Yet it returned the minute she was alone, and kept up the vexing question until it was finally lost in sleep.

Every morning came a letter from David, and Polly was invariably at the door to take it from the carrier. Sometimes it was little more than a note; but oftener it spread itself over page after page in familiar, affectionate talk.

Two days after Russell Ely had brought her up the hill, an envelope with David's well-known superscription was put into Polly's hand. At first it seemed no more than the envelope itself, so thin it was. Then Polly saw that a single sheet was inside.

"Guess he was in a hurry," she told herself, as she hastened up to her room.

She sat down by the broad window and noted the slight unevenness of the address. David's

chirography was a continual wonder to Polly, every line, every curve, according to rule. To-day, however, the "P" was a wee bit out of proportion, the "D" was slightly out of alignment, while the name showed a trifling tendency to run downhill.

"Well!" she exclaimed under her breath, "what's going to happen?" She dwelt upon it with a smile. Then she took up her paper-cutter and ran it under the flap.

Her fingers were growing eager, and with a happy flutter of heart she pulled out the sheet.

As she started to read, her face held a smile, but instantly a stare swept it away. Her eyes seemed to pierce the paper. They blazed with something like anger.

"'Appeal'!" she muttered scornfully, 'appeal,' indeed!"

The letter fluttered to the floor, her hands went up to her face, and she began to cry.

"Oh, David! David!" she whispered, "how could you! It is n't true! You know it is n't true!"

She sat there a long time. Then she picked up the sheet and read it again. Her face grew hard and resentful.

"'Smile of understanding'! He won't want me to smile at all pretty soon." She sighed. "By next week he'll be 'appealing' to me. He'll be sure to come back, if I keep still. He always does. I know David! I've half a mind not to answer

him when he does 'appeal.' Let him have a taste of his own porridge."

She went over the letter again, slowly, sentence by sentence.

Miss Polly: Since it is plainly evident that you desire your freedom from the slender bonds that bind us together, I wish to assure you that from this moment they are broken, and you are free as if they had never been. To continue the relations which have existed between us for the few years past would only pile up wretchedness for us both, and it is best to annul them. Many times I have foreseen this. On the day we took that walk to Chimney Hill and I noted the smile of understanding which passed between you and that darned Ely, I knew that sooner or later this would come. Yesterday when I heard of your intimacy with the same unbearable puppy, your rides alone with him as soon as I was out of the way, convinced me that the time for the break has arrived. You need not attempt any explanation or appeal. My mind is made up forever. Nothing can change my decision.

Very truly yours
David Gresham Collins

"'Slender bonds'!" she muttered. "I did n't know that I was bound at all, though I act as if I were. Of course, I'm 'free,' and I will be free, too, David Collins! As if you must tell me so! I wish I'd gone over to the Inn with Russell — I will next time he asks me. I won't be under David's thumb any longer! To think of his making such a fuss because I rode up with Russell — just rode up the hill with him!

"But how did he hear of my being with him?" Polly questioned. "We did n't meet anybody — yes, Doris Gaylord was out on the veranda. She may have seen me. I did n't think so. Anything she knew, Marietta'd know — that is sure. And by this time Marietta may be up there herself."

She pondered the matter for some minutes, while alternately her face flushed and paled.

"Could Marietta — ?" She shut her lips with a contemptuous little breath. "Let her!" she scorned. "I won't follow David Collins's lead."

CHAPTER III

DAVID MAKES A REQUEST

THE next morning Polly was at the door as usual when the letter-carrier came. She could not have told why. Certainly she did not expect a letter.

Mechanically she received the bunch of mail, mechanically she threw off the envelopes and papers, one by one, on the hall table. Then she stared. There was the familiar handwriting! The rest of the lot was dropped in an unsorted pile, and upstairs she sped with the letter from David. She locked her door and flew to the window-seat. This time she did not pause to note the lines of the superscription. She tore open the envelope with eager fingers.

MY DARLING POLLY: I suppose before this you have received that horrible letter that I wrote you when I was grass-green with jealousy. Throw it in the fire right now! Don't, don't ever read it again! I was an outrageous cad to write it, anyhow. But when Marietta and Doris came up here with that story, I was just beside myself. I dare say Doris put in plenty of touches of her own. Do write that you are not angry with me! Write the very next mail! It is unbelievable that I could send you such a thing —

Just my luck! The mail-boy is here, and not another chance to send to the office to-day! A longer letter to-morrow.

Always your own DAVID

Polly read it over with a smile. Again, and the smile changed to a sigh. Once more, and sorrow came into her eyes.

How like David! Mad with jealousy one day, and wild with penitence the next! Why must it be so? Why could n't he trust her?

She drew a chair to her desk and made ready to write. Then she took out the letter of yesterday and looked it over; she read again the one just received; finally she dipped her pen in ink.

She wrote fast until she had filled a sheet. Pausing to read it through, she crushed it in her hand, tossed it into the waste-basket, and began another.

That went the way of the first, and a third was written. This appeared to bring more satisfaction, for she read it a second time.

DEAR DAVID: Your two letters have made me take a long look ahead, and in view of what I see there I have come to a decision. There is no use in our going on as we have been going for four or five years. I cannot bear it. I must live my life in my own way — I must be free, I must be myself.

You would put me in fetters of your own making. Instead of trusting me out in the world, you would keep me away from the world. In fact, you would make me a prim, silent, cold somebody else, whom in time you would cease to love because I should not be worth loving.

You do not trust me, no matter what I say. You know that I care for you more than for anybody else. Many times I have told you so; still, reiteration does no good, for you will not believe. I see no way but for us to give up our plans for a future together. Even friends

must trust each other, and marriage without confidence means unhappiness for two.

Forever your friend
POLLY MAY DUDLEY

As Polly expected, David resented the high stand she had taken, and his prompt answer consisted of alternate phrases of reproach and apology. His second letter, however, was milder in tone, gracefully acknowledging his mistakes, and agreeing, if she would give him one more chance, never again to cause her grief by any behavior such as he had been guilty of in the past.

After long debates between head and heart, the latter won the fight, and Polly wrote a letter which made David go gayly for a week.

Patricia's father planned for her a birthday fête, ending with a dance, at the Illingworth Cottage at Samoosic Point, some seven miles from Fair Harbor. Invitations were sent out three days in advance, and Polly looked forward to a pleasant outing.

On the evening before the birthday she went over to see Lilith Brooks. Some arrangements were to be made for the next morning. She found her friend ready for a walk, and the two girls strolled off in the direction of green fields and fewer dwellings.

A car whizzed by, a roadster with yellow wheels. For months afterwards a yellow-wheeled roadster gave Polly a start.

"Wh-why!" gasped Lilith, "that looks just like David!"

"It is," said Polly quietly.

"I did n't know he was here." Lilith's voice still held its astonishment.

"It is news to me," laughed Polly; but the laugh did not sound true.

"Who was the girl? Could you tell?'

"I think it was Marietta Converse."

"It is queer," Lilith went on, glancing sidewise at her companion. "Do you suppose Marietta rode down from Camp Converse with him?"

Polly's heart was repeating the same question. Then things began to right themselves. If both Marietta and David had errands in town it was only natural that they should come together.

When Polly returned home she found that David had been there.

"He said he would drive over to Lilith's and bring you back," said Mrs. Dudley.

"I came the short way, cut across the Blanchards' yard," explained Polly. "That's why I did n't meet him."

"He seemed anxious to see you to-night, so he will probably be here soon. He is going back early in the morning."

"Then he won't stay for the party," said Polly. "I thought maybe that is what brought him down."

She repeated this to David himself.

"No," he replied indifferently, "I don't train with that crowd. Are you going?"

"Of course," Polly answered.

He looked at her keenly. "With whom?" he asked.

"With two or three of the girls, Lilith Brooks, for one."

"In whose car?"

"I believe Russell Ely is going to drive."

"Oh! I might have known," he commented stiffly.

Polly laughed. "No, you might n't," she returned. "Philip Lee was intending to take us, but they had unexpected company at home and their car was needed. That is why we are going with Russell. I don't see why you can't stay over and go with us."

"Marietta wishes to return at once," he said. "Besides, I don't care for that sort of thing. I wonder that you do."

"Why should n't I? They are all my friends. I am sure it will be very pleasant."

David nodded abstractedly. "There is something I wish to ask you," he said slowly, and waited.

"I am listening."

"Will you promise to do it?"

"I make no promises in the dark," she laughed.

"I should think you might do one little favor for me," he complained.

"David, I am ready to do little things for you, or big things; but I cannot say positively that I will do this special thing without knowing what it is."

"Well, then — will you, for my sake, stay away from that foolish party?"

A sudden flame in the girl's eyes made David flinch.

"So that is why you came down from Camp Converse," she said — "that!" Her low voice was tense with scorn. "You have shown me plainly — just — what — you are!"

With her first words she had sprung to her feet, and now she darted to the doorway.

"Polly! Wait! Wait!" cried David, putting out a hand.

But she eluded him and was on the stairs before he could reach her.

"Polly! Polly!" he called.

There was no answer, and he heard the door of her room shut with a click. It was quiet in the hall upstairs.

He hesitated a moment. Then he put on his hat in a bewildered way and passed out into the street.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTHDAY FÊTE

POLLY awoke early. Her first feeling was one of vague depression. Then her mind cleared, and she knew what had happened — it was all over between her and David. And this was the day of the fête, the day which she had anticipated with such pleasure! She had planned to write a full account of it to her lover. Now — ! Thoughts came fast, bringing only pain. She sprang out of bed and began to dress.

Of course, she must go to Samoosic Point. If she stayed at home it would cause too much talk. But how could she meet people with gayety, when she longed to run away from everybody, to hide, to rest, to think! She went down to breakfast with a forced smile, and managed to go through the meal without evoking any inquiries. She did not wish to tell even her father and mother any sooner than was needful.

By the time the car came she had in large measure regained her usual composure, and she hoped nobody would guess that she was playing a part.

Arrived at the cottage all was gay with flags and flowers and festival dress. Merry talk and laughter mingled with music from a hidden orchestra, the wide, glittering waters of the harbor, the arch of

blue above, made one glad to be part of such gladness. It would have been a sorrowing heart indeed that could hold to its grief amid such surroundings.

Polly was young and she was human. She was at once drawn into the heart of the festivities, until she nearly forgot that she had awakened that morning in company with trouble.

One of a group of merrymakers, she was strolling down towards Cliff Grove, when along the drive by the sea-wall came a trim motor car. Polly's breath seemed to stop — the driver was David Collins, the girl at his side was Marietta Converse!

Several spied the pair and ran to head them off. Lilith Brooks, who had Polly's arm, glanced sidewise. Polly was white, and her eyes had a look that made Lilith shrink. Yet she clung tightly to her friend, as if she feared she was going to break away. Polly, however, to Lilith's astonishment, resumed her talk with the others and did not even glance in the direction of the newcomers.

"Did you know David was here?" — "Have you seen Marietta Converse? She came with him!" — "I thought they were both in the Adirondacks. When did they come back?" — "Polly had better be looking after David! He has a new girl!" — These, with many variations — all innocently for the most part — were flung in Polly's ears through the hours before luncheon. How she met them she hardly knew; yet Lilith, loyal Lilith, reported to her afterwards that nobody would have known but

that she had planned the surprising occurrence herself.

Polly dreaded the evening. During the day she had managed to keep as far away from David as possible, and John Eustis had unconsciously assisted her efforts by inviting her, with several others, to take a sail to one of the neighboring islands. But now, as the sun was dropping low, she wondered what disagreeable circumstances the dance would bring. What predicaments might it not have in store! At first she thought she would not dance at all. But directly she decided that such a course would draw unpleasant attention her way, and David might think that she was keeping out of the frolic for fear of him. She concluded to give herself free rein rather than run the risk of such conjecture on his part.

As daylight waned it was forced upon Polly's notice that David was holding himself somewhat apart from the general merrymaking.

"I wonder if he is going to mull out the evening," she mused. "Anyway, he shall have no opportunity to think that I am forlorn on his account." And she threw herself into the fun with a zest that left little doubt in the minds of her friends that she was not grieving for her lover, whatever might be the trouble between them.

The musicians gathered on the broad veranda, the young folks flocked inside. Patricia and a New York guest led the dance.

Once Polly and Russell Ely waltzed so close to David, who was standing alone near a window, that Polly's dress must have brushed him as she passed.

"He looks as if he wanted to shoot somebody," said Russell in an undertone — "probably me," he added with a tiny smile. "What's the matter with him, anyhow?"

Polly laughed, a little light laugh which she let do duty for an answer.

"I used to like David Collins," Russell went on; "but lately, I can't understand him. . . . I thought I'd never tell you; but I believe I will."

"What?" responded Polly.

"In a moment."

The music stopped as the two neared an outside door. Russell led his partner to a small balcony, and they sat down.

"It is what he said to me a few weeks ago," he began at once, "and to this hour I cannot think what could have called it out. We met on the street, and he walked up to me and said in the most abrupt way, 'Ely, I'd rather you would steal money out of my pocket than to do as you are doing!' — I replied, 'What have I done?' — 'Done!' he ejaculated, and walked off scowling. I'd give a good deal to know what he meant."

"David is peculiar," sighed Polly.

"All of that," he returned. "If you'll excuse my saying it — I don't want to meddle or give ad-

vice where it is n't desired — I have told myself more than once, 'If Polly Dudley marries David Collins I am afraid she will rue it.' From my outlook he is not a man calculated to make any woman happy, least of all one of your make-up. Forgive my candor." For the girl was silent.

A dark figure passed below the balcony, and as the light of a lantern struck across his face they discerned the features of David.

"'Speak of angels . . .'" quoted Russell with a soft laugh. "You are not offended?"

"You are too old a friend to give offense in that way," said Polly. "I thank you."

"You need n't. Are you engaged for the next dance?"

"Yes, to me," spoke up a voice outside.

Polly started. How much had he overheard?

The musicians began another waltz.

"I'd better get out of the way," said Russell in Polly's ear. "Sorry I can't have the pleasure —"

David Collins leaped the low rail. "Come, Polly!" he said.

The girl did not stir as Russell with a pleasant word passed inside. She was thinking hard.

"Come!" reiterated David. His voice was stern as he laid his hand on her arm. The motion was one of proprietorship.

"You take a good deal for granted," spoke Polly at last. "Had n't you better sit down?"

"Don't be a fool! Come on!"

"Your implication sounds rather rude to my ears," smiled Polly.

He paid no heed. "Are you coming or not?" he asked with a tinge of impatience.

"Not," answered Polly. "I am used to being asked, rather than commanded."

"Pshaw!" David scorned. "Do you want a scene?"

"No. I want to sit still. I am tired." She sighed wearily.

"Why did n't you say so before?" pettishly. He took the chair that Russell had vacated.

"Let's go home," he resumed. "You are as sick of all this as I am."

"I am sick of the way you behave," she returned. "You make me ashamed of you."

"That should be reversed," observed David coldly.

A tiny smile puckered Polly's lips.

"Oh, yes, laugh!" he burst out. "It is what you have been doing all day."

Marietta and her partner whirled past the doorway.

Polly arose. "If we must talk in this fashion," she responded, "we had better find a more secluded spot."

"I will take you home," he decided, offering his arm.

Many glances followed them as they picked their

way between the dancers. Polly wore a mask of smiles. David looked straight ahead. So they reached the front entrance.

"I will bring the car round," he said.

"Not for me," answered Polly softly. And she stepped outside.

"Are you refusing to go with me?" he questioned severely.

"We cannot talk here," she demurred, and led the way to a seat under a tree.

"Will you answer me?" he scowled.

"You brought Marietta down, and I think you had better take her home."

"Oh! if that is all, I can come back for her. Or she can go along with somebody else."

"No," Polly replied quietly, "that will not do. I'll return as I came."

"H'm! I might have known you would not miss going with Ely."

Polly did not reply. "What do you wish to say to me?" she asked.

With a little growl of disapproval, he dropped to the seat beside her.

"If you won't," he began, "I suppose you won't; and I want this business disposed of. I am tired of our everlasting squabbling. Perhaps a girl likes it — I don't."

Polly sat silent. She was resolved not to be brought into another argument; she knew how little it would avail.

"Well?" spoke up David, after a moment of stillness.

Polly drummed lightly the arm of the bench.

"Why don't you say something?" David's voice was a bit impatient.

"I have nothing to say," she sighed.

"Not even an apology?" he asked in a surprised tone.

"For what?"

"Now, don't pose as a martyr!"

"I might," she replied with a little bitter laugh. "To-day has given me sufficient excuse for it."

"To-day!" he echoed, "to-day! When I have accorded you full reign, and let you do exactly as you pleased!"

She made no response, and he continued. "Do you think it meant no self-sacrifice on my part to allow you to come to such a party in company with another man? Is it nothing for me to let you run about with other fellows? to let you dance with those men?"

Polly smiled.

"And you sit there and laugh!" he fumed.

"Forgive me, David! But it does sound funny. You talk about *letting* me do this and that! As if you were my master! It is enough to make anybody laugh."

"So you think it is perfectly right, I suppose, for you to go round with anybody and everybody, without reference to me!"

"That was the agreement," she replied.

"It was a one-sided agreement, anyway," he grumbled. "It left me nowhere."

"I am afraid no agreement would stand," Polly returned. "I only wish you could see things from my viewpoint."

"Oh, yes! You are on Don't-Care-Hill. That's your viewpoint! If I were there, it would n't make any difference to me what you did."

"So you think I don't care!" Polly shook her head with a queer little smile. "But what is the use of going over all this again!" she cried. "How came you to stay over for the fête?" She was sorry the instant the words had crossed her lips fearing what it might lead to.

"Marietta wished it for one thing. And you don't suppose I would allow you to come down here without me, where I could n't keep an eye on you — where — oh, darn it! I'm not going to let you go round with Ely and his crowd — not if I can help myself!"

"Tell me about your trip down," said Polly, ignoring his answer.

"There is n't anything to tell," sulked David.

"Guess I'll get Russell to take me up to your camp some day," said Polly quietly. "I should like to see if there is n't something on that long road worth talking about."

The young man's face grew dark.

"You'd better try it!" he cried. "If you ever

do, you'll see me when you get there! And you'll hear me, too!"

"Why should it be any worse for me to ride up there with him than it was for you to drive down here with Marietta?"

For an instant David stared, a singular, astonished expression on his face. Then it changed. "Oh! you're jealous of Marietta, are you?" he sneered.

"No, David," she answered, "not a bit. But one looks to me about the same as the other."

"Well, it is n't. I was speaking of coming, and Marietta said she wanted some things at the house, and I told her I would drive her down — just a sort of business arrangement."

"Yes," laughed Polly, "I guess that's a good name for it, just a business arrangement." She laughed again, a queer little laugh that made David look at her in a puzzled way.

"You know I don't care anything about Marietta Converse," he said.

"And you know that I care nothing for Russell Ely," returned Polly.

"Huh! Looks like it!" scorned David.

"You would n't believe me if I told you that a thousand times. I am tired of being doubted and watched. If you ever reach the point of trusting me, I will —"

As she arose a little group of merry young folks came chattering down the path. One girl spied Polly and David.

"Oh, come on, you two!" she called. "We're going for a row."

They halted opposite.

"Give you just three seconds!" cried Clay Boynton, pulling out his watch and striking a match.

Polly returned a light refusal, which started a string of remonstrances.

A boy laid hold of David; but he slipped the grasp and catching Polly's arm pulled her down beside him on the bench.

"Nice, refined crowd you train with!" he growled before they were well out of hearing.

Polly attempted no apology, only drew away with a quiet good-night.

Without an answering word he let her go, a slim white figure, across the lawn.

CHAPTER V

"I WILL TAKE CARE OF PARADISE WARD"

ON the top floor of the Children's House of Joy was the most beautiful hospital ward in the whole world. When Mrs. Gresham was completing her plans for the institution Polly Dudley was often called into consultation, and it was decided to give the prettiest ward to those children that were ill with incurable diseases. Mrs. Gresham had ordered many appurtenances which Dr. Dudley called foolish extravagance, but in which she and Polly reveled, anticipating the delight of the little unfortunates for whom they were devised.

"What shall we call it when it is done?" Mrs. Gresham had said one day, as she and Polly were overseeing the final touches to the wonderful apartment.

"If I have my way," Polly had declared, "it shan't have one letter of 'incurable' in its name."

"You can have your way," Mrs. Gresham had asserted. "And you must hit upon something soon, if I'm to get any sleep. Last night I lay awake full three hours muddling my brain over it, and then I could n't think of anything half pretty enough."

"Something has just come to me!" Polly had cried; "but maybe you won't like it. What do you say to 'Paradise Ward'?"

At that Mrs. Gresham's delicate hands had clapped the softest of applause, and the ward was named.

Paradise Ward was indeed a marvel of beauty, from the fairy stories in fresco upon the walls to the dainty little fountains that sent music and perfume throughout the apartment. There were the cushioned rolling chairs with the dearest little tables and pockets that held dolls and toys and picture books of just the right size for frail little hands. There were cages of charming love birds that never wearied one with piercing songs. There were the little white-and-gold beds, with lilies and roses at head and foot, blooms that never faded or grew limp with age; there were small bookcases that one might whirl and whirl and find the very book that was wanted; there was a glass-doored cupboard that held the loveliest of little and middling-sized china plates and cups and saucers, just big enough for small people to eat from, and they had wreaths of pansies and sprays of checkerberries, for one to look at while eating. Then, there were the dearest, littlest dishes for the dollies, too, so that they could eat their dinners with their mammas — oh, wonderful things could be found in those pretty cupboards! Plants and vines grew and bloomed all over the big room, and clocks! — such delightful clocks! In one lived a cuckoo that came outside every half-hour, just long enough to tell its name. And there was a bigger clock upon which perched

an owl, and the owl would say, "Tu-whoo!" or "Tu-whoo! whoo! whoo!" according to whether it was one o'clock or three. And all the little folks that lived in Paradise Ward knew it was the loveliest place in the world, for nobody ever told them that the reason they were brought to so beautiful a home was because they would never be well again as long as they lived.

Polly Dudley had not seen David or heard from him since the night of Patricia's birthday fête. That was eight days ago. It might as well have been eight months or eight years — so Polly felt. She was weary with the ache of it. She wondered for the thousandth time if she had done right to leave him so abruptly. Perhaps she had been too harsh. She could not decide, and as the days numbered more and more, her sorrow and restlessness increased. Her father and mother were in hearty accord with the stand she had taken, yet even their sanction did not bring her peace.

So often before these dreary days had she dreamed of wide estrangement between her and David, and had been thankful even to tears when she had come to herself to find she had been only dreaming. But from this there was no awakening.

Yet there were hours when it seemed as if the trouble must be unreal. She and David drifting farther and farther apart never to meet again in the old way! No, that could not be true!

To-night she sat alone in the living-room, ap-

parently reading; but David kept obtruding himself into the story, so that it did not run smoothly. Every little while the reader would sigh, and yet the tale was supposed to be humorous. Finally she became aware of voices in the room adjoining, a little room where Dr. Dudley went whenever he could spare a few minutes' time, to rest or to think over cases that troubled him. At first she did not recognize the woman's voice; then she knew that it belonged to Miss French, one of the nurses.

"I don't know what we're going to do," the nurse was saying. "I hoped she could stay to-night; but her mother is so much worse that she was just about crazy. She said she must go, and you can't blame her."

"We'll have to get somebody outside," said Dr. Dudley.

"We can't!" asserted Miss French. "There's a shortage of nurses everywhere, so many are off on vacations. I've telephoned and telephoned — I did n't want to bother you if I could help it — and Dr. Macy told me to engage the best I could find; but there is n't a soul to be had."

"If Mrs. Dudley were at home she would go in for to-night; but we'll get along somehow. They are all pretty well in there, that's a good thing."

"Yes, Paradise Ward is the easiest to handle," assented the nurse.

Polly had been listening, listening closely, while red spots fluttered in and out of her cheeks.

"I will take care of Paradise Ward," she said quietly.

Dr. Dudley and Miss French looked up to see Polly standing in the doorway.

"That is," she added, "if father thinks I am competent." She had appeared to be addressing the nurse; now her eyes met the physician's.

"You are perfectly capable, as far as that goes; there is no acute illness there. But you might not wake if you were needed."

"Of course I should!" she declared. "I wake very easily."

"You can try it. I dare say to-morrow we can find somebody."

"I'll be ready right away," she told Miss French, and ran upstairs.

Polly opened softly the door of Paradise Ward. The dozen small occupants were in bed, and a dim night-lamp was burning. The nurse who had made ready for the night had flitted away to those that were waiting for her. Polly did not think her entrance had awakened anybody; but a small head was raised from its pillow, and a voice called out in a low, delighted tone, "'Llo, Mi' Duddy!"

The girl hastened across the room, to pat the mop of yellow hair and to hush any tendency to talk. She was acquainted with little Marmaduke Bill, and she knew the importance of cutting off his flow of prattle before it became an uncontrollable stream.

"So long you did n' come, Mi' Duddy, My thought My should die."

Polly smiled down on him, and said softly, "Now you will go to sleep, for I shall be right here all night."

A little hand was reached out, to stroke Polly's. "My's glad, My's very glad, Mi' Duddy." And he shut his eyes in content.

Polly was a frequent visitor in Paradise Ward, and "Little Duke" was as beloved by her as by Dr. Dudley himself.

Few of the small patients needed much attention that night from their new nurse; still, Polly really slept but little. The novelty of her position as well as plans for the near future pushed sleep into the background and kept it there.

The next day nurses were as scarce as on the night previous, and Polly, signifying her willingness to remain in Paradise Ward, was gladly allowed to stay. But when a trained assistant was to be had, and Polly begged not to be turned out, Dr. Dudley remonstrated against the confinement, maintaining that by September Polly would be in no condition to return to college. The girl, however, insisted that the light work was just what she needed to keep her mind busy with outside thoughts, and finally she had things her own way. Her father and mother could see plainly enough that she was lighter-hearted than she had been since her separation from David, and her patients

all agreed with Little Duke, who told Polly very solemnly "Mi' Duddy, if you go away, My shall feel rot-ting!"

So Polly did not go. Instead, she began at once to carry out some of the many ideas that had come to her since her installment in Paradise Ward. Polly was as observing now as she had been in her childhood, and a day had not gone by before she was planning little new things for the supposedly perfect ward. She was aware that she had only to hint of these to Mrs. Gresham to have them there at once; but she did not wish to apply to the founder of the hospital. So when she could get somebody to take her place for an hour or two she would go off on shopping trips and come home with all sorts of accessories for the ward. First she brought a new hair-ribbon for Clementina Cunio, a bright pink ribbon to replace the one of dingy brown. And the child's delight repaid Polly in full for the small expenditure of pocket-money. But that small purchase set in motion a chain of wishes which Polly feared for a time was to be a chain after the style of the usual ten-cent concatenations. When William Moleski saw the pink bow sitting so jauntily on Clementina's head, he was instantly seized with a desire for a tie of like color for his neck. Then Timmy Dennis began to long for a similar adornment to tie around the collar of his little striped nightgown. The color had taken the ward by storm, for one after another expressed

a wish, more or less boldly, for some ornament of the same hue. The young nurse was mildly surprised when Annette Lacouchière asked for a pink dress; but her astonishment reached its height at the observation of Little Duke.

"Mi' Duddy, My's good boy. My won't cry ever when My is inside o' pink all over!"

Polly brought home other and apparently more useful articles than pink ribbons. One day it was some pretty boxes of tiny sheets of note-paper, with so many little envelopes, in the same delicate tint, that one might spoil two or three and still have enough left.

At another time her purchases were two little washtubs, each big enough to hold a dolly's frock, and — most charming of all — two little electric flatirons to make the dainty wardrobes smooth and beautiful. These had been suggested by Zulette Mardee's sighing statement to her next-chair neighbor, that her beloved Theodora had n't "a single clean dress to her name," and that nothing would make her so happy as to put them into the washtub. Grissel, the neighbor, had agreed with her perfectly, whereupon the succeeding day both little girls were in soapsuds up to their elbows, their small tables wet from end to end and spilling over, and their faces joyous as a June morning.

"You are making yourself a lot of work," commented a young nurse to Polly.

"A lot of pleasure, you mean, don't you?" returned the Doctor's daughter.

Miss Bartlett shrugged her small shoulders.

"I'll give you a week to find out," she laughed.

CHAPTER VI

"MAYBE"

THE tiny girl sat in her pillowed chair by the window while the lady from the next street talked with Aunt Sophie. Mrs. Hamilton Garde wanted Aunt Sophie to go over to the great house where she lived and clean some walls and floors. Now they were haggling over the price, or, rather, Mrs. Hamilton Garde was haggling. The plump little woman who scrubbed for her neighbors never haggled. She quietly stated her price by the day or by the hour and let her patron talk. To-day the patron, being Mrs. Hamilton Garde, had argued and hinted and argued again for full seventeen minutes, and finally decided that even if twenty cents an hour was an unreasonably high price to pay, the work must be done and she should not feel justified in hiring somebody outside of the neighborhood. So she bade the little plump woman with red, big-jointed hands "to be sure and get over there and ready to work right on the notch" — which meant seven o'clock on Thursday morning.

Long before this, the child had tired of the uninteresting talk, especially as she had heard the same thing many times over which always ended in the very same fashion. She was looking out of the win-

dow when Mrs. Hamilton Garde passed her on the way out. The baby-blue eyes were dwelling on the big, shining car in front of the little house.

Mrs. Hamilton Garde noted the earnest look, and she asked sweetly:

"Are you fond of motoring?"

"Motoring?" repeated the little girl in a puzzled tone.

Mrs. Hamilton Garde laughed in silvery tones, and simplified her question.

"Do you like automobile riding?"

"Oh!" cried the small voice. "No, ma'am — I mean, I guess I should. I never did, you know."

"Is that so?" laughed the woman. "Well, I'll take you some day — to-morrow, maybe. Good afternoon, Mrs. Edmonson. Be sure and come early. Seven o'clock sharp on Thursday!"

"Oh, Aunt Sophie!" the little girl burst out as soon as the door closed, "did you hear what she said? She's going to take me to ride! Just think, to-morrow!"

"Maybe!" added Aunt Sophie.

"Oh, I guess she will!" cried the little one, her wee face aflame with joy. "She *promised*, you know, and everybody always does just what they *promise*. I've heard Sardis say lots of times that he'd got to do something, because he'd *promised*. What time do you s'pose we'll go? As early as this?"

The little woman's lips opened — and shut. She waited. "I'm sure I don't know," she said at last.

"I wish you were going, too," the child said wistfully; but Aunt Sophie was silent. The doubt in her kind heart did not reach the wee girl at all. When Aunt Sophie looked at the happy face and sighed, the child was gazing far away into to-morrow afternoon, seeing herself seated among those beautiful, soft cushions and whirling off down the street; whirling away, uphill and down, and out into the land of flowering fields and gay gardens, wide blue lakes and high green hills, running brooks that sang as they went, and deep ravines filled with ferns that never saw the sunshine; whirling on and on to those wonderful delights of which she had seen so little and which Brother Sardis had promised should be hers as soon as she went to live with him. And now it was all coming to-morrow! She ate her supper that night to the whirring of cars, the blare of motor horns, and — yes, the odor of gasoline. She talked about it, too, as she ate, and never noticed that Aunt Sophie was more than ordinarily silent.

Next morning, as soon as she awoke, the tiny girl found herself in a strange state of excitement, and contrary to her usual custom she called Aunt Sophie to her bedside.

"Had n't you better dress me right away, so I'll be all ready to go when Mrs. Garde comes?"

"You need n't be afraid of her getting here before your breakfast," laughed Mrs. Edmonson grimly. "She don't have hers till ten."

"Oh!" exclaimed the little one, "are you sure?"

"I ought to know," the woman replied. "I've been there often enough and heard Tilly and Sadie scolding because the breakfast was all dried up waiting for her."

"Anyway," the child smilingly insisted, "it would save trouble to put on my best clothes now, and then I should n't have to make her wait, no matter when she comes."

"You're a queer young one to get around things," Aunt Sophie laughed. Then she brought out a little striped pink gingham frock, snowy white petticoats, and a pair of shiny black shoes none too large for a two-year-old baby, while the little girl in bed watched the preparations with smiles of approval.

"You must n't set your heart on going this afternoon," Aunt Sophie finally advised. "To my mind it is very uncertain whether she comes" — there was a perceptible pause — "to-day."

"Oh, I s'pose it will be just as nice if she should n't come till to-morrow," the child reflected, "'cause then I shall have it longer to think about. You see, one day does n't make much difference," she philosophized. "Yesterday it seemed a perfect age till to-day, and now it's right here in no time at all. I guess it's always that way. So if she does n't have time to come to-day, I shall know to-morrow will be here in just a few minutes. But I

guess she'll come — I kind o' feel it! Don't you ever feel things coming, Aunt Sophie?"

The plump little aunt bobbed her head with a "M-h'm" over the drawer where the small girl's stockings were kept.

The little one chattered on until she was seated in her high, cushioned chair at the breakfast table.

"Now you'd better let your victuals stop your mouth," laughed her aunt, not unkindly. "If you don't keep still, pretty soon you won't be fit to go to ride or anywhere else. You've talked every minute since you woke up."

The child pressed a forefinger to her smiling lips, while she looked across the table in merry response.

Morning usually slipped swiftly away with the elder member of the household, but dragged more or less wearily with the little one who had nothing to do but to sit at the window and gaze across the street and up at the lawns and gardens that surrounded the home of Mrs. Hamilton Garde on Burton Avenue. She could catch glimpses of the great house, with its towers and multi-colored roofs, as the green branches waved to and fro. The stables and garage were at the foot of the hill, almost directly opposite the little gray house, and a path led down from the mansion above. Few trod this path except the stable boys, the coachman that drove the handsome pair of black horses, and the two chauffeurs who had charge of the shining cars.

The watcher at the small window never tired of

looking at those beautiful cars when they came out of the garage, and they generally did come out two or three times a day.

This morning there was no weariness in the baby-blue eyes as they watched for one of the chauffeurs to come down the path. Of course, the little maid told herself, Mrs. Hamilton Garde would not come for her until afternoon — she wondered whether it would be at one or two or three o'clock. Anyway, she was ready, all ready except for the putting on of her coat and hat. She drew a sigh of satisfaction. It was so comfortable to know that one was ready for whatever came. Then she fell to thinking of the happy letter she would write to Sardis, dear Brother Sardis, about the wonderful ride that Mrs. Hamilton Garde had given her. Brother Sardis never spoke of Mrs. Hamilton Garde these days. But she could remember a time, long ago, — she was such a mite of a girl then, — before Sardis went to live with Uncle Dwight, when he used to hate the rich woman who lived in the great house on Burton Avenue, because of the way she had of tossing her head with a gay little laugh whenever she chanced to come upon him with his sister in his arms. As she thought it over now, she wondered why Mrs. Garde had laughed. She was sure it was a very nice thing for Sardis to do, nothing at all funny about it as far as she could see. Sometimes she knew that he had stayed away from a ball game just to carry her out for a long walk. Perhaps she

did look funny in his arms, for Sardis was rather small for his age. Once — she should never forget it! — Mrs. Garde had said, "So you're taking out your doll for an airing!" And then she had laughed that gay little laugh. Sardis had watched the carriage into the distance with a dark, scowly face. He had said something, too, under his breath that she could not hear, and when she had asked him what it was his face had grown very red and he would not tell. Dear Brother Sardis! How she wished she could see him this very minute! As soon as she had had her ride she would write to him all about it, and how surprised he would be!

The sight of the tallest chauffeur coming down the path put a stop to her musings, and she watched him as he disappeared in the garage. He generally drove the big car. "Oh, I hope it will be the big car this afternoon!" she said to herself. It was the big car now, for the tall young fellow drove it from the garage and then stopped, jumped out and ran back for something. He drove directly by the window and up the road to the great house. Mrs. Hamilton Garde was going to ride. The little girl drew a long, happy breath — it was nice to have so beautiful a thing to anticipate.

"Maybe she'll come right after luncheon," smiled the wee maid two hours later from her high chair; — "you said she did n't have dinner at twelve, as we do." She looked across to her aunt for reassurance.

"She has hers at six," answered Aunt Sophie.

"Maybe she'll come at two o'clock," the little one prattled on. "Don't you guess it will be about two?"

A quick shade passed over Aunt Sophie's round face. Then a smile came out.

"Maybe," she said.

"Is n't it perfectly beautiful that I'm going?" the child went on. "There'd be room for you," she observed wistfully. "Won't you go if she asks you?"

"No danger of an invitation," with a short little laugh. Seeing the reflection of her own shadowy thoughts on the small face opposite, she added quickly: —

"I could n't go, anyway; I have too much work on hand to go gallivanting off across the country."

"Too bad you can't," was the plaintive regret. "When Sardis gets his car you'll have to go."

Aunt Sophie nodded smilingly. "Oh, yes, I'll go when Sardis has his car."

"He says he's going to have one some day," returned the child, wagging her small head emphatically.

"I don't doubt he will," said Aunt Sophie. "He's got a good many things I never would have believed he'd have. He's the greatest boy for carrying out whatever he starts on. If he should happen to want to be President, I declare, I d'n' know but he'd get there."

The little flower face shone, as it always did

when "Brother Sardis" was being praised. For the moment Mrs. Hamilton Garde was utterly forgotten.

Two o'clock came, from the old-fashioned clock on the kitchen shelf sounded two heavy strokes, the little girl at the window feverishly watched the path that led down to the garage; but nobody appeared.

"I guess she's taking a nap," were the unspoken words that tried to chase away a wee doubt which for a good many minutes had been pressing its way into the hopeful little heart. "Of course, she'd take a nap before going out again!"

Whether there was a nap or not, neither of the chauffeurs came into sight. Half past two — three — half-past three — four — all ticked themselves away on the old clock. It was very quiet in the front room of the little gray house. The light haze that brooded over the hills seemed also to have veiled the blue eyes at the window. Still, they kept loyal watch.

By and by the child suddenly straightened — the tall young chauffeur was striding down to the garage! It seemed as if the blue eyes must pierce the side of the low building, so eager were they to see inside. Presently the big automobile came out and whizzed past the window.

"Aunt Sophie! Aunt Sophie!" cried the little one joyously, "do come and put on my things! She'll be here in a minute! The man's gone round!"

The little plump woman ran in breezily. "What is it, dear?"

"Please bring my things. I don't want to make her wait. There! they're coming!"

"No, no, child! That's only the undertaker."

"Well, she will be here right off. Do hurry, auntie! The man just went round to get her!" The child leaned forward, to catch the first glimpse of the returning car.

Aunt Sophie stood — unmoved as to feet.

"Better wait," she said, "till she comes."

The little one turned to look up into her aunt's face, and her eagerness nearly faltered.

"Why, you don't want to make her you?" she asked wonderingly.

"Well, I guess her time is n't over valuable," she said slowly. "Anyway, I would n't put on my things yet."

They waited, the one all a-quiver with anticipation, the other gazing, not down the street, but at the child, her round, usually placid face now lengthened by lines of tenderness and pain.

The automobile did not come back. Finally Aunt Sophie crept quietly away to the kitchen, where she could not see the little white face by the window. The child was still scanning the road hopefully when, just before six o'clock, the big car returned to the garage, empty except for the liveried driver.

Aunt Sophie entered the room in her preparations for tea.

"She did n't come," needlessly announced the small voice. "I guess she thought she'd wait till to-morrow."

The little woman sighed softly.

"I think she'll come to-morrow," went on the voice in cheerful tone.

"Maybe," returned Aunt Sophie.

CHAPTER VII

GLADYS GUINEVERE

THE sun was radiant; the sky wore a most alluring blue dress; the breeze was sending up little velvety waves and ripples from the south; — Polly wanted Outdoors. As she gazed from the open window she grew eager. Her mother happened in and proposed to stay awhile and give Polly a chance.

The girl looked around the ward, and considered. There was Timmy — Jozy — She hesitated at Clementina and finally shook her head with a sad little frown. Her eyes passed to Grissel, and brightened — Timmy and Jozy and Grissel. That was enough.

She glanced across at her mother who was giving Little Duke a drink.

"Is father away?" she asked.

Learning that he was in the hospital, she went in search of him.

"Would Timmy and Grissel and Jozy be any worse for a little ride?" she questioned, her anxious eyes on her father's face.

In a moment she was running up the stairs, stopping only for a word with an orderly. When she entered Paradise Ward her face was as bright as if she had just been made heir to a fortune.

For the next ten minutes she and her mother were busy bringing out coats and hats and putting the three fortunate little patients into their wraps.

"Are we going to sit on the veranda now?" queried Jozy.

But Mrs. Dudley only smiled mysteriously. It would never do to tell too much to the part of the ward that must stay at home — there might be tears. But, as two orderlies carried the lucky ones out through the corridor and downstairs, those who were left behind knew that something unusual was afoot. If Clementina and the rest could have looked round the corner of the building they would have seen the three packed snugly into the Doctor's big, easy car, to the music of gurgling laughter and silver-toned tongues.

Straight to the blossoming fields and piney air they were borne, and the children chattered and giggled as only children can, while Polly drew in deep draughts of the freshness of mountain and wood, and wondered how the dwellers in city prisons ever lived through the summer at all.

Nearing a neighboring town, their road led through a street bordered with miserable dwellings and swarming with sinister men and women and ragged, pinched-faced children. Polly looked at them with pity.

The car swerved suddenly, to avoid a crossing team, and Jozy uttered a wild "Oh!"

Polly glanced back at her charges with a reassuring smile.

"My handkerchief!" screamed Jozy, pointing to the little square of white that had fluttered away from her.

But already an eagle-eyed youngster had pounced upon the flyaway. With a joyful grin she brought it to the car.

"Oh, thank you!" cried the owner in a relieved voice.

Evan was starting up again when Polly arrested him. "Just a minute!" she said. Something in the girl's wistful little face attracted her.

"Would you like a ride?" she asked, throwing open the door.

The black eyes widened. The child drew a step nearer, then stopped with a dazed expression. She must have been mistaken!

"Will you come?" Polly held out her hand.

Nothing further was needed. In a short moment the little one was wedged between Polly and Evan, her face radiant with pleasure.

Wonder-eyed youngsters popped out from everywhere and closed in about the car.

The driver waved them off, there was a bur-r-r-r-r, and the automobile disappeared around the next corner.

"It's ezac'ly like flyin', ain't it?" piped a rapturous voice at Polly's elbow.

"Do you like it?" smiled Polly.

The child looked up with an ecstatic wag of the head.

"Oh!" she burst out, leaning forward and waving her hand excitedly, "there's Dolly Merrifield! An' she saw me a-ridin'! She waved to me! Did you see her?"

"Yes," smiled Polly, having glimpsed at the window of a small gray house a tiny waving hand and a little white face in a halo of fluttering yellow curls.

"I'm so glad she saw me a-ridin'," the eager voice went on. "I've wanted to an' wanted to, till it seemed 's if I could n't stan' it. An' now I'm in an' goin'!" She sighed delightedly.

"Have n't you ever been in an automobile before?" was Polly's somewhat surprised question.

The small head shook vigorously. "How'd yer s'pose I'd git in?" she scorned. "Ther' ain't none of 'em stop, 'cept the grocery boy an' the waterpipe man an' such, an' they say, 'You let me ketch yer in that car, an' I'll hand yer over t' the p'lice — now d' yer hear!' An' you bet I ain't goin' t' take no such chances 's that! Johnny Hurley did, one day, whopped right in over the door, an' the man give him a lickin', 'cause he was his cousin — my, did n't he! Johnny could n't set down straight all day." Presently there came another outburst. "Oh, would n't Dolly Merrifield like this! — Do you know Dolly?" Polly shook her head.

"Oh, you oughter! Say" — the brightness faded from the little face — "would n't you've took her to ride 'stead o' me if you'd known her? I guess I'd oughter let Dolly go — I did n't think. Honest, I did n't! But I guess I'd oughter." She sighed heavily at this prodding of conscience.

"Oh, you need n't worry about that!" comforted Polly. "We can take Dolly another time, you know. Tell me about her. Who is she?"

"Why, she's Dolly Merrifield! An' — oh, she's the sweetest little thing you ever saw! She's got the *littlest* legs — just like our baby's! An' she don't *never* walk! She don't never *stand up!* An' she don't cry nor nothin', 'cept when the lady did n't come to take her to ride — then she did, good an' hard. Oh, that lady's just as mean! I wish *she* had to sit in a chair all day long, 'ithout anything to do, an' be all alone, an' never go to ride in all her life — so there!"

The animated face had grown red and scowly during the utterance of this bitter wish. Now it unexpectedly broke into a delighted grin.

"Did yer honest mean for sure you'd take Dolly to ride?"

"Yes, 'honest, for sure,'" laughed Polly.

"Well, I hope the lady'll see her," the child resumed. "*She* goes to ride every day — two or three times a day! She used to be real pretty; but I don't take no stock in her now — her a-promisin' Dolly — an' Dolly a-waitin' an' a-waitin' —

an' her never comin'! Dolly wored her eyes out watchin' for her — Mis' Edmonson said she had. Oh, I jus' hope she will see Dolly when you take her — then I guess!" The small head was brought down decidedly.

"You have n't told me your name yet," Polly smiled.

"Oh, my name is Gladys Guinevere Evangeline Smith! But you need n't go through all that rigmarole, you can call me Gay; everybody does. An' ter think of me a-ridin'!"

As the car stopped in front of Gladys Guinevere's home it found itself the center of a crowd of girls and boys, mothers and babies, with an occasional lounger who quite casually started to walk across the street in front of the machine and quite as casually stopped on the outside of the circle.

Polly was many times obliged to reiterate her promise to take "Dolly" to ride; but at last all the questions had been asked and answered and all the "thank-you's" and "good-byes" had been said. Then, amid the scattering onlookers, with much waving of hands on both sides, the car rolled away.

CHAPTER VIII

COUCHES OF CLOVER

FOR a whole week Dr. Dudley's automobile was active in professional work; then word was brought Polly that the car would be at her disposal for three hours that afternoon. Her plans were already made, and as soon as her morning tasks were completed, leaving her mother in charge of Paradise Ward, Polly started on her way to Prattsboro and Dolly Merrifield.

The little girl was at the window. "Come in!" she called when Polly lifted the old brass knocker.

The broad kitchen was alive with sunshine, but the bareness of the big room struck the girl disagreeably as she opened the door. At first the child at the window was not visible. Then a winsome little voice said, "Aunt Sophie is n't home."

Polly peeped around the door, and smiled.

"I want to see Miss Dolly Merrifield," she said.

"Oh! me?" exclaimed the little voice.

"If 'me' is Dolly," dimpled Polly, taking the small, thin hand in hers.

"Oh, yes, of course, I'm Dolly! Are you the lady who took Gay to ride?" she asked shyly.

"The very one," Polly nodded. "Now, what do you say to a ride yourself this afternoon?"

The little pale face was pink with surprise and

a kind of awed joy. "Oh!" she breathed, "oh! — this afternoon?"

"I can have father's car this afternoon," Polly explained. "It has been busy since the day that I made Gladys Guinevere's acquaintance."

The little girl smiled. "What a long, funny name she's got! Mine is Dorothy, but 'most everybody calls me Dolly. Sometimes Sardis does; just once in awhile, you know."

"And who is Sardis?"

"Why, don't you know Sardis? His name was in the paper, Sardis Elisha Merrifield. He was the valedictorian of his class." The long word fell easily from the small lips.

"At the Grammar School?" asked Polly.

"Oh, no, at Yale College! He graduated two years ago. He is a minister, you know. This summer he is preaching up in Raineville, or he calls it 'learning to preach.' I guess it's preaching all right." The curl-crowned head wagged confidently. "You see, he has been two years in the Theological School, and he's got one more year before he can be a full-fledged minister. Then I'm going to live with him!" Her face glowed with radiant delight. "He says I am going to live with him if he has to take me to Kamchatka."

Polly joined in her laugh.

"Is he the only brother you have?" she questioned.

"Yes, he and me and Aunt Sophie are all there

is. There used to be father and mother and grandpa and James and Israel and little Dorcas; but they've all gone to heaven. I've lived with Aunt Sophie almost ever since I can remember. Queer, you don't know Sardis! Seem's if everybody ought to know him, he's so nice."

"Perhaps I shall know him some day," smiled Polly.

"Perhaps," echoed Dolly wistfully. "He is n't here much. I know you'd like him — you just could n't help it."

Polly had to make her visit a very short one, for she would be needed by her little charges. She went back to the House of Joy, her heart full of sympathy for the wee girl who had never walked and who had been waiting a long year for the ride that had not come. "She shall go as often as I can take her," she promised herself as she rode home in the trolley-car.

Clementina, Muriel, Jeffy, and Little Duke were selected by Polly for the afternoon's pleasure, and Dr. Dudley sanctioned her choice.

Aunt Sophie was at home when the automobile stopped in front of the low-roofed house in Prattsboro. The little maid was at the window, hat and coat on, and at once all smiles when she saw Polly.

While the chauffeur was carrying his light burden out to the car Polly found time for a moment's talk with Dolly's aunt, and the quiet, wise-eyed little woman pleased her mightily.

The small guest of honor let her tongue play freely, and sympathetic Polly was sorrowed by her glimpse of the shadow of such an affliction. A barren, sad little life it must be, yet the tiny maid was seemingly not yet conscious of any poverty or pathos in her surroundings.

"My brother's coming home for a day or two sometime this summer," she informed Polly. "He said in his last letter that he was going to give me a ride when he came. But you have got ahead of him," she chuckled. "He wanted to take me to hear his valedictory when he was here two years ago in June; but it rained that day, and I could n't go." For an instant a shade dulled the little face, then it made way for a smile. "What do you think!" she broke out, "He delivered his address to me — with all the motions, too! Was n't that lovely of him? Aunt Sophie said she guessed not many boys would have done it just to please a little sister. Oh, he's the nicest brother in the world! And he would n't have a new suit after all! We wanted him to; but he said his old suit was good enough. Of course, he'd look better than the rest, anyway — he's just lovely!"

Behind Polly a ceaseless stream of lively chatter told her that Clementina was enjoying herself. Jeffy, too, was puncturing the air with wild exclamations. Presently was heard the voice of Little Duke.

"She will, too, you little stick-in-the-mud! My good boy! — Mi' Duddy! Mi' Duddy!"

The girl looked round.

Little Duke almost tumbled towards her in his eagerness.

"Mi' Duddy, My want to lie down out there." He pointed to the field of mossy rocks and lush clover.

"Oh, dearie, I'm afraid it's damp!"

"No, Mi' Duddy! Dear Mi' Duddy, My is good boy! My won't be damp."

Polly laughed, but asked Evan to stop while she went on a trip of investigation. "All right," was her verdict, on returning to the car. And instantly there was a clamor of voices from the back seat.

"Oh, may I go, too!" — "I want to lie on the grass, Miss Dudley!" — "Please, can I go?" — "Do let us, Miss Dudley."

"We'll all go," Polly agreed. And in Evan's arms the children were carried, from Little Duke to Dolly Merrifield, to bask among the sunny clover-blossoms.

Little Duke sucked the sweet blooms, gazing contentedly up at the white sails on the deep blue sky. Presently he spoke.

"My will stay here all night. My won't be 'fraid. My will hold you' hand, Mi' Duddy."

"But I shan't be here," smiled Polly. "I must go home."

"My will stay alone. Stars will be here. My will hold Clover's hand."

Still, even clover-blossoms lose their attractiveness after awhile, especially when there is a cushioned automobile in waiting; and after a quarter-hour of the sunny couch Little Duke was ready to relinquish present sweets for the swift-rolling car.

"Did you like it?" Polly smiled down into the white little face beside her. She fancied it held a faint reflection of the clover's own color.

"Oh, it seemed as if it must be heaven!" sighed Dolly Merrifield softly.

It was a very tired little girl that Evan laid carefully on the couch in Aunt Sophie's living-room. But her eyes were shining with joy. She put out a small hand and caught one of Polly's.

"May I kiss you?" she whispered. "I want to because you have given me such a lovely, lovely time. I'm going to tell Sardis all about it and how good you've been to me."

"Thank you, darling," Polly whispered back. "I think outdoors is what you need, and just as soon as I can get the car again you shall have another ride."

Dolly looked her thanks, but said not a word beyond a softly breathed "O-h!"

CHAPTER IX

NO. 45678

AT the dinner table Polly told her story of the afternoon's pleasure.

"I am glad you can take them out," said Dr. Dudley. "The air will do them more good than anything else."

"I know it will," agreed Polly confidently. "They ought to have it every day."

"You may have the car as often as possible," promised the Doctor. Then he addressed his wife on another subject.

Meanwhile Polly was busy with captivating new thoughts, and shortly she sent a question straight into their talk.

"How much money have I in — Oh, I do beg your pardon!" she cried, meeting her father's glance. Then she laughed. "I had been thinking and did n't even know you were talking."

"What is it that is so engrossing?" smiled her mother.

"I'll tell you," she returned gayly. "Father, how much money have I in the bank?"

"I don't know. I can give you some — how much?" He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"No, no!" cried Polly; "I don't want any now

— none of yours at all. May I take some of my money and buy whatever I choose?"

"It depends on what you wish it for and how much it costs."

"It can cost almost any amount, but I'll try to be contented with a cheap one. Father, I want to buy an automobile and learn to run it myself." Her eyes were bent anxiously on his face.

"No, Robert," interposed Mrs. Dudley, "don't let her! I should n't be easy a minute."

The Doctor smiled. "She is equal to it, Lucy — you need n't worry; though it seems rather unnecessary when there's a good car in the family already."

"But how seldom I can have it," argued Polly. "And those children need the rides every day. If you could have seen them this afternoon!" She stopped — waiting.

The Doctor sat back in his chair and studied the pattern of the tablecloth. The eyes of both women were on his face.

"I'll think about it," he finally said. "I don't like the idea of your cutting into that little sum. You know what I have saved it for, Polly."

The girl's face flushed. "I know, father." She faced him with steady eyes. "There's no use keeping it for that. I shall never marry."

"Nonsense, child! you will marry a good deal sooner than I shall wish, but — I'll think it over."

The door had scarcely shut upon the Doctor before Polly clapped her hands softly.

"Father's 'I'll think it over' is every bit as good as a straight-out yes."

"Polly, I don't want you to have a car if you must drive it yourself."

"Why, mother dear, it is n't anything to run one now."

"Not simply to run it. In case of emergencies, however, one must possess nerves that are under perfect control."

"I know," Polly answered gravely; "but what is the matter with mine? Besides, I should n't drive fast or run any risks."

"I should worry about you every minute. Foolish, you and your father would say; but I should all the same."

"Don't! — for I dreadfully want one. If you could have seen how Little Duke enjoyed it today!" And she repeated his remarks.

Within a week Polly had her license and she and Evan were spinning over the country roads in the new car, Polly chuckling over her number, which she declared was the very best in the whole list. She was an apt pupil, and absolutely without fear. Mrs. Dudley soon decided to take some of the children and occupy the back seat, rather than wait at home wondering if anything had happened, and her first ride with Polly at the wheel seemed to rid her of all apprehension. She argued no more against the new machine.

The car was in use whenever its owner could take

out any of her small patients or leave them. None needed skilled care throughout the day, and several of her friends were ready to act as substitute for an hour or two at almost any time. Patricia or Lilith or Hilda would frequently be found in charge of Paradise Ward, while Polly and her mother were downtown on a shopping excursion or on some visit across the city.

She had run down alone one afternoon to make some small purchases, when, on coming out of a shop, she found herself facing John Eustis.

"I'm glad to know you are still in the flesh," he began. "I never get sight of you nowadays."

"Is it as much as a week since I saw you at Vesta Jordan's?" smiled Polly.

He laughed his answer. And then, "Going home? May I walk up with you?"

"You may ride up with me. I drove down, that being the quickest way."

They were silent until they were beyond the business streets.

"You have a dandy car, and you are an expert in running it," praised John Eustis. "That bit of maneuvering was well done."

Polly looked pleased.

"I am not wholly sure of myself yet," she admitted; "but I have n't made any big break since I gave up Evan. Even mother is n't afraid to ride with me."

"She has no need to be afraid," he returned.

"I am glad you think so," was all Polly said.

"I should have come up to your house to-night," went on John Eustis, "if I had not met you. Can you get off from your job for a week-end?"

"I am afraid not. I have enlisted and I must stick to my post."

"You ought not to have enlisted."

"Oh, yes, I ought! I would n't give it up for anything."

"Maybe you'll be more persuadable when you hear where I want you to go."

Polly looked at him questioningly.

"Do you remember Sally Robinson?"

"How could I forget Sally! She was one of the dearest girls in our class."

"She was — and she is. And she is home from Texas —"

"Here?" cried Polly.

"No, at Overlook — up on the mountain."

"Where is that?"

"In Vermont, just beyond the line. Kate had a letter from her this morning. She has invited mother and you and Kate and me — and she says as many more of the girls as we can pile into our car — to come up on Saturday to stay until Monday, longer if we can."

Polly's face had grown bright and grave by turns. "You going?" she asked wistfully.

"We are, most decidedly. Would n't miss it for a farm."

"I wish I could," sighed Polly.

"You can! You must!"

"I am not so sure." A little scowl troubled her forehead.

"Remember, it is Sally that asks you," he coaxed.

"I don't forget," she returned. "I will go if I can manage it; but when I am away somebody must stay with my little patients, and it is not in my plan to call on mother all the time. I promised to take care of Paradise Ward, and I won't be a slacker."

The young man did not reply. Polly was gazing straight ahead into the distance, as if her thoughts were a long way afield. As he looked, his face took on alternately grave lines and gladsome. He, too, was following paths quite afar from the state road.

Soon they were making a slow passage over a thoroughfare that was being repaired. Polly had thrown aside her other problem and was concentrating all her knowledge and skill upon her not easy task. The street was full of pedestrians and automobiles, and one needed a clear head, quick thought, and ready hands. John Eustis was an expert driver, yet he discovered no flaw in Polly's management.

When the road was clear, "Another score in your favor," he smiled. "Evan must be a good instructor."

"He is," she returned. "John, I have been

thinking — I believe I can see my way to go. How early shall you start?"

"Eight or nine in the morning, if possible. It is better to get over a good piece in the cool of the day. Something more than a hundred miles, and we don't want to take it too fast."

"It will be a lovely drive, along by the Connecticut."

He nodded. Things were going happily. "What other girl shall we invite? The car will hold one more."

"Have you thought of anybody?"

"Kate spoke of Grace Comstock and Lilith Brooks and Claire House. She did n't seem to have any preference."

"And you have none yourself?" queried Polly.

A dull red crept into his cheeks; but instantly it was not there.

"Anybody that pleases you," he answered.

Polly hesitated — what made John blush? Had he a choice which he did not wish to make known? Then she said, "Suppose you invite Lilith. She has always liked Sally, and she is a good traveling companion."

"I will ask her to-night and tell her you are going."

"No, no! Don't tell her that!" cried Polly. "I can't say positively until I have seen father and one of the nurses. I'll let you know."

And with that he had to be content.

CHAPTER X

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

"POLLY DUDLEY! Why did n't you stay?" Polly stood before her mother in her trim gray suit, her eyes shining with an unusual brightness, her whole being indicative of imprisoned emotion.

"I could n't, mother! I could n't! I had to come home to talk it over with you and father!" Polly was hurriedly pulling off her gloves, her joyous heedlessness reaching even to her finger-tips.

Mrs. Dudley had grown suddenly limp.

"Has David —" she began.

"No, no; it is n't anything about David." Polly's voice had never sounded like that when she spoke of David.

"I don't much care what it is, then." Mrs. Dudley sat up straight and drew a little relieved breath. "It seems as if I could n't stand his coming back — now. But I don't see why you did n't stay as you expected to. Did n't Kate stay?"

"Oh, yes, mother; but I just could n't! — I'll tell you."

"Did n't you have a good time? Anything gone wrong?"

"Yes to the first, and no to the second. Don't

be in a hurry! To begin with, Overlook Mountain is the very loveliest place on earth."

"And yet you left it," laughed her mother.

Polly laughed, too. "Had to!" she said happily. "Oh, the road up the mountain! — I wish you could see it. Through the most beautiful woods! Ferns! — I thought I knew ferns, but I did n't. Millions of them, almost as tall as you are, and so luxurious — why, the sides of the road look as if they had just been decorated for a wedding! —"

"What about a wedding?" came from Dr. Dudley in the doorway. "Evan said you had just come, and I could n't understand it. You were so eager to stay the week out."

"I know it. Mother's had everything bad happening; but it's all right — or will be if you agree with me — oh, father, you would in one minute if you could see Overlook! Why, when I got there and looked around I felt as if I were right on top of the world — it is beautiful, it is grand! Father, what do you suppose I want to do?"

"No telling what rattle-brained scheme is in that head of yours. Out with it! I never could bear suspense."

Polly laughed, a laugh that made her father look at her with joyful eyes. This was his own old Polly, before she had begun to be worried with troubles of David Collins's making.

"Well," began the girl, holding her excitement

in check, "I want to move Paradise Ward up on Overlook for the summer and autumn."

Nobody spoke. They looked at one another, anxiety on Polly's side, astonishment and half comprehension on the other.

"Tell me all about it, little daughter." Dr. Dudley drew up a chair.

So Polly told; of her delight in the spot; of the marvelous beauty of the view; of the wonderful, intoxicating air; of the plan that had suddenly popped into her head when she waked on Sunday morning; of the news that had greeted her at breakfast, just fitting into her scheme, about the brother and sister, owners of a bungalow and a study on the top of Overlook, who had just been left a fortune in Switzerland and wished to sell their property on the mountain; how it seemed the one place for Paradise Ward to get strong in; and of how she could not wait an hour beyond to-day to tell her father of her plan and to beg him to accede to her wish.

She was quiet at last, watching with eager eyes her father's face.

"Have you thought of the money it would cost to carry out this plan?" asked the Doctor quietly.

"Of course," she acknowledged, "it must depend on Mrs. Gresham; but I know she will be interested in less than a minute."

"She surely will be. That, however, is not the question. She has spent a fortune on Paradise Ward already."

"She loves to spend it."

"Yes," he conceded; "yet is it wise for us to incite her to further spending?"

"It truly is," returned Polly with assurance. "Think of those dear children! Oh, if you could see them outdoors as I do! The rides have done them no end of good — you know how Little Duke has improved."

Dr. Dudley brightened. "That boy's gain is astonishing."

"And it is n't medicine that has done it," observed Polly; "it is fresh air."

The Doctor nodded musingly.

Polly's thoughts skipped from Little Duke to Esther Tenniel, the gentle little English maid who — however shy she might be with others — never hesitated to put her arms round the Doctor's neck, just as if she were his own little girl. "I believe," she said, "that a few months of Overlook would make a new child of Esther."

"I should like to see it tried," Dr. Dudley admitted.

"Then we'll try it!" exclaimed Polly ecstatically.

"I shall have to leave it to your judgment," said the Doctor. "I don't like to beg for too much."

"Beg!" laughed Polly — "oh, father!"

"You have n't even asked for my approval," smiled Mrs. Dudley.

"I don't need to. I know well enough just what you'd say," retorted Polly.

"I should like to know."

"Why, you'd say, 'Go ahead!'" Polly laughed. "And I think I'd better see Mrs. Gresham this evening. Don't you want to go down with me, mother? Do, and help the good cause along. — Oh, I forgot! That boy is coming up to-night."

"What boy?" queried her mother.

"John Eustis. Well," sighing, "we'll have to put it off till morning."

That Mrs. Gresham was "interested" in Polly's plan nobody could doubt. The lady's enthusiasm more than justified Polly's prediction.

"I must see the place at once!" she cried. "We'll go up to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!" gasped Polly.

"Why not?" returned Mrs. Gresham. "No time to lose. Summer is well on her way. You can go to-morrow, can't you?"

"I — guess so," the girl answered dazedly. She glanced towards her mother.

Mrs. Dudley smiled assent.

"And you'll go with us?" invited the elder woman.

Mrs. Dudley shook her head. "I'm afraid — "

"Nonsense! She can, can't she, Polly?"

"Yes, do, mother. I'm longing to have you see it."

She still shook her head, but, as Polly said, the shakes were less emphatic.

"Let's start by six o'clock," went on Mrs. Gresham. "To-day would have been lovely, but probably to-morrow will be just as nice. You say we can have it now, and with all the furniture?"

"All there is," Polly answered. "Of course, there'll have to be a good deal besides. The living-room is so large and beautiful it will make a lovely ward. At each end is a wide casement window, one opening on the road, the other on the wood — where the deer come down. As I said, about five acres of timber-land go with the place. The house is the best located of all on the mountain, with woods on the north which break the heavy winds. There's a big fireplace in the living-room, and all sorts of pretty nooks and corners, with shelves and bookracks — oh, you'll go crazy over it, just as I did! The big room is two stories high, and the stairs lead right up from that to a little balcony which runs clear across the side and opens into the bedrooms. The other building is not far away, an inscription in such pretty letters, THE STUDY, is right over the door. You see, the young man is a lawyer, and that was his den. It will do beautifully for a dormitory for the older boys and the doctor that father sends with us — of course, we'll have to have a doctor."

"Of course," echoed Mrs. Gresham absently. "The brother and sister gone?"

"Yes, nobody left but the housekeeper, Benedicta Clapperton — is n't that a name? But she's

a dear. She told me she hoped I'd buy the place, for she 'appertained' to it, and she 'cackerlated' I was the 'facsimile' of her 'dear Miss Flora.' She adores children, and Sally says she is a wonder in the cooking line; so she will probably stuff the ward with soldiers and sailors and a whole barnyard besides. But I have fallen in love with her, and I believe she will be our strongest asset — just you wait and see!"

When Mrs. Gresham and Mrs. Dudley were face to face with the "strongest asset" they recalled Polly's statement in some surprise.

Mrs. Gresham had intuitively pictured the caretaker as middle-aged, plump, and comfortable, with a benevolent smile and a gracious manner. The woman who stood before them was tall, straight, and lean, with a small head and high cheek-bones. Her abundant brown hair was drawn smoothly back from her low forehead and wound into a tight coil on top of her head. Her frankly curious eyes of light gray appeared to size up her visitors in one unafraid glance, and she extended a big, work-hard hand with a drawling "How d' ye do?"

So this was Benedicta!

Polly chanced to make a trivial remark, and Mrs. Gresham turned with relief.

Although the visitors had stopped on the way for luncheon, the housekeeper insisted that they should "stay to dinner," and already a small table

in the living-room was most attractively set with appointments for three.

"Yes, Benedicta can cook," Mrs. Gresham mentally conceded, as she ate with relish the broiled chicken, creamed pease, hot rye muffins with home-made butter, red raspberry pie, and hot coffee topped with whipped cream.

Nor did she withhold her praise; upon which Benedicta expanded like a flower which needs only the sunshine to bloom into beauty. Not that in the one happy moment the cook grew handsome, or that she expressed her thanks in suitable words. Only her small eyes grew bright and soft, her thin cheeks reddened with pleasure, as she said, almost scornfully, "Amazin'ly astounding 'f I did n't know how to cook! Been at it since I was an infant."

Opinions are versatile notions at best. After that informal meal on Overlook Mountain the critical wife of Colonel Gresham looked at Benedicta in a humorous and therefore fairer light, and the light in which a person is viewed makes all the difference in one's opinion of him.

The next day when the party started for home the Von Winkelried property had passed into the hands of Mrs. Gresham, and the Children's House of Joy was in legal possession of a mountain summer home.

CHAPTER XI

DR. ABBE

ALTHOUGH Mrs. Gresham and Polly were most closely concerned in the plans that crowded the next week, Dr. Dudley's home and the entire hospital were a little off their balance. Mrs. Gresham was chiefly occupied in arranging for minor alterations in the new Overlook Home and purchasing furniture and other appointments that would be needed; while Polly and her mother inspected the small patients' old clothing and ordered new, for nights would be cool up on the mountain and suitable garments must be ready for any emergency.

All the nurses were wondering whose services would be required for the new sanitarium, and each hoped the good fortune would be hers. The rest of the summer among the Vermont hills, with Polly for companion and only a dozen or so interesting children to care for, was a snap to be eagerly caught up. Not many of the doctors appeared to be giving much thought to the matter; only two or three let it be understood that they had no desire to be dispatched to the "Top of the World," with a few kids and two or three girls for sole company.

It was at dinner that Dr. Dudley and Polly first touched upon the subject of helpers for the Overlook home.

"You had better take two nurses with you," observed the Doctor.

"How could I need them?" returned Polly. "Unless in case of an epidemic," she laughed.

"Easy enough," replied the physician. "I want you to have a good rest."

"Yes, two are none too many," added Mrs. Dudley.

The girl scowled musingly. "I am afraid they will be in the way," she demurred. "It depends on which can go."

"How should you like Miss Curtis and the assistant dietitian?"

"Perhaps it would be well to have a dietitian along," she answered. "Only Benedicta may object."

"We won't ask her permission. It shall be Mrs. Daybill and Miss Curtis, then."

"No, no! I don't need Miss Curtis. I'll tell you what I have thought of," she went on. "You know, Lilith has n't been feeling quite up to the mark lately, and she is so handy with children, I have been wondering if it would n't be a good plan to ask her to go with us. I am sure she would like nothing better."

"First-rate. Unless the children are really ill Lilith will do as well as any one."

"Of course, we must have a physician. Can you spare Dr. Abbe?"

Her father gave a little laugh. "He must be obviously fit, since we both had him in mind."

"And I, too," smiled Mrs. Dudley.

Polly clapped her hands softly. "He is so shy," she explained, "I think he will do better than any one else. He won't be bothering round — like Dr. Marston, for example."

"Dr. Abbe is a fine young fellow," commented the physician.

"And a good doctor, is n't he?"

"He is all right," nodded her father.

"But suppose he should n't want to go? I heard that Dr. Leggett is hoping *he* won't be called."

"Leggett has too many interests here in town."

"One big interest," Polly smiled. "Dr. Abbe is too diffident to look at a girl; but the children like him immensely. He is bashful even with them — I have noticed it. Strange he should be, so able a man."

The Doctor looked at Polly meditatively. Only that afternoon he had seen this same shy young surgeon stop to gaze from a window that commanded the garden where Polly was gathering sweet pease. He wondered now if it would be wise to send Dr. Abbe to Overlook.

Polly glanced up from her plate to meet her father's eyes.

"What is it?"

"I was thinking — how should you like Dr. Prowitt, instead of Abbe?"

"Oh, father, the children can't bear him! Little Duke would have a fit, if he were along. Did n't I tell you what he said? The Doctor had just been in, and Little Duke looked up at me and asked, with a queer expression, 'You like him, Mi' Duddy?'

"'He's all right,' I answered. He eyed me closely, and then said, — 'Docker Prow't is a b-i-g w-i-n-d that comes down the street 'thout any sunshine.' And you ought to have heard him say it — away down in his throat. No, I could n't stand 'Docker Prow't' up at Overlook!"

They laughed; then the physician grew grave again.

"Well — I did n't know," was all that he said; but he left the table still wondering if he ought to send Dr. Abbe.

Of course, there was just a chance that Polly at the sweet-pea bed might not have been the brilliant objective point of the Doctor's eyes. If only this had been the first time! Well, perhaps he and Polly could compromise on one of the others.

The girl, however, had no doubts concerning the wisdom of selecting the shy young surgeon for the House physician of Overlook, and within an hour she had settled the matter beyond recall.

Quite by chance Polly met Dr. Abbe while on

her way to June Holiday Home. She was about to pass him with a pleasant word when she stopped abruptly.

"Oh, Dr. Abbe!" she cried, "have you seen father?"

The Doctor looked troubled.

"Not since dinner. Is he missing?"

"No," laughed Polly. "I meant about Overlook. We were wondering at dinner how you would like the appointment."

The young man's face flamed. "Indeed, few things would give me as much pleasure."

"Then it is all right," Polly exclaimed. "I thought you'd fill the position better than anybody else — "

"Oh, Miss Dudley, you are too flattering."

"No, it is true. The children just adore you."

"Oh!"

"Yes," Polly went on, "I told father I thought you'd be the very best one to go with us, and he agreed with me. I did n't know but he had seen you already."

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion," he replied, his face still aflush. "How soon are you going?" he added.

"As soon as we can get ready. It may be lonely for you," she suggested. "It is miles away from anybody, except a few farmers along the side of the mountain, and you feel farther off than you really are, because only one farmhouse is in sight."

"I could never be lonely, Miss Dudley, never," he assured her. "I am certain I shall love it all." His blush deepened as he let slip the word.

"That's jolly," Polly smiled. "It was the only thing I was afraid of. I am so glad you are n't that kind. I think the sunsets up there — yes, and the sunrises — must be magnificent. And the air! If you have never been up on a Vermont mountain you can have scarcely any idea of the wonderful air. I am sure it will do the children no end of good."

Of course, Dr. Abbe thought just as Polly did, and they soon parted, the girl to forget all about the young physician, and Dr. Abbe to wonder if his good fortune were really true or if he were dreaming.

CHAPTER XII

PATRICIA AND A FEW OTHERS

DURING these days that were filled to the very brim with plans and the carrying-out of them Polly had little time for thoughts of David or herself. Not a word had come from her quondam lover, until she had almost ceased to expect to hear from him. To her astonishment, when she had time for reflection, she found that David did not seem to occupy the same place in her heart as before this overpowering interest in the hospital's new possession. She did not quite understand it. She felt that she still loved David as well as ever, yet she was as confident as she had been on that night down at Samoosic Point, that she could not accept more promises which were almost sure to be broken.

Occasionally came a day when she would long for David with all the ardor of her nature. Even Overlook would seem commonplace in comparison with this irresistible passion to be to him what she once had been. Patricia, never very tactful, spoke one morning of David.

"Does n't he ever write to you?" she asked.

Polly's simple negative did not satisfy her.

"Great lover he is!" she burst out. "It shows how much he really cares — to break off in this fashion!"

"But, Patty, you know we were never engaged," returned Polly, flushing and paling with the memories which were thus suddenly brought before her.

"'T was n't his fault," Patricia laughed. "Don't you honestly think, Polly, that if you had consented to an engagement he would n't have been so jealous? You see, then he'd have been sure of you."

Polly shook her head. "It would have been just the same," she said.

"Well, I don't know," the other concluded. "But I do know this — you have been too meek from the first. If you'd flirted round with the other boys, he'd have got used to it. Even now you stick to him, I know you do; you have n't been with anybody else all summer long. Catch me being so loyal to a man of David Collins's caliber! Why don't you wake up and have a good time? You know you could have anybody in our set. They'd run for you if you'd as much as wave your little finger, every man of them."

"Patricia Illingworth! what nonsense you are talking! I am not in need of any man, and you know I abominate flirting. I shall never marry. I am going to be a nurse — I have made up my mind."

"A nurse! a nurse! Polly Dudley a nurse!" Patricia swayed in a paroxysm of glee. "That's too funny!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at," grumbled

Polly. "Don't be so silly!" as Patricia broke into fresh giggles.

"What will you wager that you'll be engaged before I am?"

"Oh, Patty, stop your nonsense! I am in no mood for fun of that kind."

"Then you ought to be. This nursing business right on top of the David affair is making a regular nun of you. I think I'll speak to your father about it."

"I think you won't! I want you to come up to Overlook and stay a week next month. Will you?"

"A week in that out-of-the-world place? I should die of homesickness. Who's going to be there, anyway?"

"Just the children and the housekeeper, and one doctor and the dietitian, besides me."

"And 'me' is worth the whole posse put together. Which doctor?"

"Dr. Abbe."

"Abbe? Abbe? — oh! that good-looking little fellow? Does he know how to flirt?"

"I hope not! He knows too much to be a fool. If he did n't I would n't have him there."

"Guess I'll come and teach him how — yes, I'll come."

"You won't come to visit me unless you promise not to lead him on — to nothing. Besides, you might get caught in your own toils."

"I can take care of myself, thank you."

"I am not so sure of that," Polly demurred. "You didn't use to be this way, Patty. What's the matter?" She had dropped into a confidential tone.

Patricia's face grew pink. She laughed uncertainly. "Oh, I'm all right!" she returned, stooping ostensibly to tie her shoe, which the other was positive did not need tying.

"I don't like it," Polly went on softly; "I like you best as you always have been. You are too much a woman to be a flirt."

"It's fun!" laughed Patricia. "You may as well break men's hearts as to have them break yours."

The eyes of the girls met, Polly's soft with sympathy, the other's sharp with recklessness.

The next minute Patricia was rattling on again. "I don't believe I'll come up, after all," she observed lightly. "I'm afraid Abbe is n't a good sport. Why don't you take Marston? He knows how to keep up his end."

"I don't want him," replied Polly.

"Would n't he feel flattered to know that!" laughed Patricia.

"He would n't like the position. He would want to go down to Overlook every evening. You know Lilith is going up to help me?"

"No! Is she really? I'm afraid you will both die of lonesomeness."

"We shall love it," Polly assured her with emphasis.

"I'm willing. On the whole I think I'll come. How soon you going?"

"Next week if the cabin is ready."

"How alluring that sounds! Bye-bye! Be good to yourself, and don't fall in love with that little Abbe! — No, dear, don't come down, I can let myself out."

Polly turned back to her room with a faint smile. "Fall in love with Dr. Abbe!" she scorned. She had been writing to her Cousin Floyd. He was about to be married, and when Patricia came she was explaining to him why she could not be present at the wedding. She took up the half-written note upon her desk.

"I should n't want to go, anyway," she said to herself. "I am not interested in weddings — I wonder if I ever shall be."

Suddenly her eyes brimmed. "Oh, David," she sobbed softly, "why could n't you trust me!"

Tears eased the tension, and presently her thoughts touched Patricia. So she, too, had become acquainted with sorrow. Her old friend was surely not the sweet-hearted Patty she had known so long. Could the trouble have to do with John Eustis? Until quite recently the two had seemed to drift together wherever they might be, and Polly had sometimes wondered if they cared seriously for each other. Now she recalled that

Patty seldom spoke of him in a personal way, and her name had not been included in John's list of possible members of the week-end party at Overlook. Patricia was not a girl to give confidences freely. Hitherto she had never seemed other than happy; and her griefs if any existed had not been shared even with Polly.

That afternoon in the bookshop she met John Eustis. As he waited at a counter, she fancied that he was graver than usual; then, as he turned, a smile illuminated his plain face, and he came forward quickly.

"It's an age since I've seen you!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you had gone."

"Not till next week. Mrs. Gresham decided that the kitchen must be enlarged and have a piazza of its own; so we're waiting until the addition is floored and shut in. I am wondering what Benedicta will say."

He laughed. "Write me. It will be worth hearing."

"Come up to Overlook and hear it," Polly returned. "Why can't you and Kate? — Do!" She was about to add, "Patricia has promised me a week," but a sudden impulse made her wait.

"Perhaps we can," he answered, with thanks, his face lighting. "Kate would be overjoyed. I must n't tell her just yet," he laughed, "or she would n't give me any peace until we were in the

car, ready to start. But I will surely try to bring her up before you come home."

Now was her time!

"I do hope you will," she said. "I want a visit from all my friends while we are there. It would be jolly to have a regular house party, but that is impossible. Patricia has promised me a week — if only you and Kate could come then!" She was furtively watching his face, and noted the almost tragic expression that suddenly swept it. The pallor was closely followed by a veritable blush, even up to his hair. She had caught him unawares, and guiltily she dropped her eyes.

Straightway John was under control, saying in even tones: —

"That would be fine, indeed; but it is barely possible that I shall not be able to come at that time. Business must be considered first, you know, and we are unusually busy this summer."

Polly went back to her car, where the children were waiting, feeling that one thing was sure — it was John Eustis who had caused Patricia's bitter, reckless mood. But what was the trouble? That would be harder to discover.

Her patients chattered and laughed with one another; occasionally the little one who sat between her and Evan would call her attention to something along the wayside and receive an absent answer; but Polly's mind was engaged with matters far from the country road. What was the trouble

between Patricia and John? If she could only get them up to Overlook at the same time! But — well, perhaps she had better let matchmaking alone. She hoped it would right itself — John was such a nice boy!

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT SARDIS SAID

POLLY was preparing the chosen ones of her small flock for a ride. Of late automobile rides had been few, the driver's time having been too full of indoor work. "They will live outdoors in a few days," she told herself, when her conscience had pricked her for keeping them in the heat of Paradise Ward. But this morning no pressing task was at hand, and she happily made ready for a short ride into the country, planning to call for Dolly Merrifield on the way.

"Miss Dudley, there's a woman downstairs who wants to see you," announced Andrew, one of the orderlies.

"Did n't she give her name?"

"No, ma'am, she did n't. I'll step down and find out."

"No, no," returned Polly. "Probably it's about one of the patients, and it is n't I she wants at all. If you'll see to the ward a minute, Andrew, I'll be right back."

As Polly entered the reception room a plump little woman arose and greeted her.

"Why, good-morning, Mrs. Edmonson," cried Polly. "I was just going out to your house, to take Dolly to ride."

The woman shook her head sadly. "I'm afraid she won't be able to go. Thank you just the same; but she is n't a bit well."

"Oh, I'm sorry," responded Polly.

"Yes, it's too bad. I think it may be the heat, we've had such awful weather; but I don't know. It's about her I've come down this morning. I did n't know but your father would go up and see her some day; I felt he'd be better than anybody else."

"Oh, yes, of course," returned Polly, "and he'll be glad to come. What seems to be the matter — just weakness?"

"Yes. She sits there looking like a little angel, and growing whiter and whiter every day. I carry her out to the doorstep after the sun is gone, but it don't seem to do her much good. I'm afraid she's just fading away. If anything does happen, I don't know what Sardis will do. That child is the very apple of his eye."

"I'm so sorry, so sorry," Polly sighed. "I'm sure father will come to see her right away — I'll find out." She stepped to a telephone and took up the receiver.

"Is father there? . . . Will you please say that Polly wishes to speak with him." Presently she came back.

"Father says he will drive up to see her at five o'clock this afternoon. Now, don't worry another bit. I feel sure that he will bring her out all right.

You think she could n't bear even a short ride? Well, perhaps we'd better wait and see."

Dr. Dudley was a little late to dinner. Polly waited for him anxiously. She had become attached to little Dolly Merrifield, for helplessness always appealed to her, and the tiny girl was rarely attractive.

Presently she heard a step in the hall, and the Doctor walked in.

"I stayed too long to visit with my patient," he said as he sipped his soup. "Have I kept you waiting? Where is your mother?"

"Why, mother's at the church to-night. Don't you remember? She told you she should n't be home. No, dinner has n't waited a great while. I am glad you were only visiting. I was afraid Dolly might be worse — how is she?"

"I could n't discover any urgent need for alarm. The child is in a bad way; but we must remedy that. She needs good country air and food. I fancy Mrs. Edmonson does n't set a hotel table. Evidently there is not too much money. What does the son do, did you say?"

"The son? Oh, Dolly's brother! He is a minister away up in New Hampshire, graduated from Yale two years ago."

"Probably he is n't making a fortune, then," he smiled. "I wish the child was up there with him. But I don't see why you can't take her along with you. It will be better than any tonic I could give her."

"To Overlook? Oh, I wish I could!"

"Why can't you?"

"In the first place, I did n't suppose they'd let her go, and then when I heard how weak she is I thought it would n't be of any use even to think of it."

"'T won't hurt her a mite — do her good."

"You think she can bear that long trip?"

The Doctor nodded. "She might have to lie down on the way, but that would be easy enough."

Polly's face had grown very bright. "I should love to have her with us," she responded. "What did they say? Or did n't you speak of it?"

Dr. Dudley shook his head. "I said nothing of Overlook. Probably they will be glad to have her go; they ought to be. You'd better see Mrs. Edmonson at once. The time is getting short."

Dolly's aunt did not receive the proposition as gladly as had been expected.

"You see," she explained, "I'm afraid Sardis would n't hear to letting her go so far with strangers. Of course," she hastened to add, "I'd be willing enough; it might do her no end of good. But Sardis, he is so afraid something will happen to her. It's nice of you to want to take her, and I'll write him to-day; though I have n't much hope he'll let her go."

As for Dolly herself, she sat in her cushioned chair, eager-eyed at first, but disappointed as she listened to her aunt's objections.

"Why, Aunt Sophie," she once ventured to pipe, in her tired little voice, "I do guess it would make me 'most well, same as Miss Dudley says. I know I could coax Sardis to say yes, if I only had him here."

"I don't doubt you could," returned her aunt with a little laugh; "Sardis would tear the house down and make a bonfire of it if you wanted him to; but he ain't here, and I don't know. I expect, though, he'll be against it, he's so careful."

Polly went over and sat down by the little girl before leaving.

"Don't worry, dear! Maybe Sardis will say yes — who knows!"

"He would if he was some folks," returned Mrs. Edmonson; "but he is n't. I know just what his answer will be."

The brightness which had come into Dolly's face vanished and left it listless and dull.

Aunt Sophie, also, grew sad.

"I hated to say that," she whispered to Polly as she stood on the doorstep; "but I could n't let her go on hoping and hoping, as I was afraid she would. I wish she could go; but Sardis, though he's smart as all creation, acts kind o' foolish sometimes. I'll let you know soon's I hear. I can telephone from the grocery store."

Polly was more disappointed than she at first realized. She was indignant with this brother of the queer name. To think anybody could be so

pig-headed as to refuse to believe what her father asserted as truth. If it were only he that would suffer through hot August, instead of sweet, frail little Dolly! He must be an ignorant fellow, this Sardis. Polly said to herself that she would like to tell him what she thought. It would n't be very flattering to his judgment. She wondered if she could induce him to be sensible if she should write herself; but finally she decided to wait.

Nearly a week passed, but no word came from the little far-away New Hampshire town to the Children's House of Joy. At last Polly was so anxious that two days before the morning of starting for Overlook she drove out to Prattsboro.

Mrs. Edmonson had received no answer to her letter. Perhaps Sardis had been too busy to go to the post-office, his aunt thought likely. He lived quite a distance from the center, she said. She did not appear to be much disturbed; but little Dolly looked whiter and wispier than ever. Polly's heart ached to see her.

"It won't make any difference whether we hear or not," Mrs. Edmonson said dully. "I know Sardis well enough to know he would not do anything about it. So don't let it change your plans in the least. I may get a letter to-morrow. He'll answer — he always does."

Polly drove sadly home and told her father the disappointing news.

He was sorry and said so. "Probably," he

added, "the child won't live through the summer if she stays here."

Polly went back to her duties, almost wishing that she had never seen Dolly Merrifield.

The next day went its hot, lagging way, and Paradise Ward prepared for an early morning start. Polly put her little folks to bed early, and when they were asleep she went downstairs, leaving a young nurse in charge.

"No message from Prattsboro, I suppose," she said to her mother.

"Not a word. It is too bad."

"I'd like to give that Sardis a shaking," said Polly grimly. "When the dear child could be so comfortable and happy up on Overlook!"

The two were still talking when eleven strokes from the clock in the next room started Polly to her feet. "And I meant to be asleep by this time!" she laughed.

One of the hospital orderlies appeared at the door, an envelope in his hand.

"Dr. Dudley wished me to give you this. He will be down in a few minutes."

Polly took the telegram wonderingly, then opened it. "Mother!" she cried — "listen!"

Raincville, New Hampshire, July —

To Robert Dudley, M.D.,
Children's House of Joy, Fair Harbor, Conn.
Your letter received. A big Yes. Everlasting thanks to you. Sardis Merrifield

81004B

CHAPTER XIV

PARADISE WARD ON WHEELS

THE little gray house in Prattsboro, opposite Mrs. Hamilton Garde's garage, saw busy hours throughout that sultry July night of Sardis Merrifield's message. Aunt Sophie and a kindly neighbor mended and stitched and washed and ironed and packed, to get Dolly ready for her journey next day and the outdoor months to follow.

Meanwhile the little maid for whom they labored slept quietly in the adjoining room, all unknowing of the delights in store for her.

The next morning at eight o'clock a little procession waited in front of the Children's House of Joy, making ready for its start on the long journey to Overlook Mountain.

At the head stood Colonel Gresham's seven-passenger car, in charge of John, the Colonel's chauffeur. Next came No. 45678; then Russell Ely, who had placed himself and his car at Polly's disposal; while Colonel Gresham's small truck, piled with all manner of luggage, tagged the three. The children were chattering and snickering as only little people can. There were last words to say, last bundles to dispose of, and all was hilarity and happiness.

"Now, father," said Polly, "remember that you have promised to come up in August for a few days at the least, and you must plan to make it a week if you possibly can. You owe it to yourself and to your patients. I do wish you and mother could come together."

She looked appealingly into Mrs. Dudley's eyes.

Her mother smilingly shook her head. "I'll try to come," she said, "and I'll do my very best to make your father keep his promise; but I'm afraid we can't come at the same time."

"When are we goin'?" piped up Timmy, flinging the query in Polly's direction.

"As soon as I can make this box stay where it belongs," she laughed. "There! I believe that's positively the last."

Her eyes scanned the running-board, the walk, even the roadway. Was everything in? She paused, thinking.

"Don't try to find a single package more," laughed Lilith. "If we don't start pretty soon —"

"Oh! I forgot —" She dashed towards the house.

"What? What?" cried those nearest.

"Ain't we goin'?" queried a worried little voice.

Russell was already leaping after Polly, while Lilith reassured the anxious tot. In a moment the two runaways reappeared in the doorway, Russell carrying Polly's forgotten lunch basket.

This made the grown folks laugh. Then every-

body said good-bye. There was a waving of hands, the cars burr-r-ed and sizzed and smoked; there were more good-byes and hand-wavings — and they were on the long way to Overlook.

Reaching Prattsboro Polly Dudley's car whirled ahead of the procession and speeded around to the little gray house.

Dolly Merrifield was at the window, ready from hat to shoe, and even more radiant than usual.

"I never was so taken back in my life," declared Aunt Sophie, looking up from the suitcase she was strapping. "I got a letter from Sardis just now, telling why he did n't answer mine. He had n't got it! And to think your father should take the trouble to write! Well, if he had n't, Dolly could not have gone — that's all. I'm mighty glad he did, and we all are. Why, Sardis says he went to the post-office and there was n't any letter from me. You see, it got mixed up with somebody else's mail, and he had n't got it even then; but he'd heard about it, though. Such doings!

"According to Sardis, anything your father says, goes. I did n't know he knew him; but it seems he'd heard all about him — when he was down at Yale, I guess. He says he would n't have Dolly miss it for anything. Dear me, this string ain't long enough! I'll have to tie a piece on. Thank you. Guess my fingers are nervous. There, that's all! My! all those autos going? Won't you have a splendid time! How far'd you say it was?"

"About a hundred and forty miles."

"My!" ejaculated Mrs. Edmonson again. "Well, you've got a lovely day. You'll let me know how Dolly stood it, won't you?" she asked a bit anxiously as she followed the others to the sidewalk.

"I'll send you word right away," Polly reassured her. "Father says she'll get along all right, and we have a doctor right here, if we should need anything. And a nurse, too," she laughed. "They are going to be with us all summer."

"Oh, they are!" exclaimed Aunt Sophie in a relieved tone. "I shall feel easier about her, then."

They had reached Polly's car, and Russell put the little girl on the front seat, between the driver and Lilith.

Aunt Sophie stepped upon the running-board and kissed Dolly again, and then backed out to make way for Polly.

"I'll write to you, Aunt Sophie," promised Dolly. "Don't work too hard! And don't forget to take a nap before you do the dishes, 'cause you were up all night!"

That was a wonderful ride to most of the passengers. It was just warm enough to be comfortable, with a fresh breeze — exactly such a morning as Polly would have chosen.

"Tired, dear?" she questioned, smiling down into the little face.

"Not a bit," Dolly smiled back. "Is n't it splendid! Are n't you glad Sardis said yes? I wonder if he ever had such a nice ride."

"I guess so," laughed Polly; and then, "Have you thought, dear, you will be nearer your brother than when you were at home?"

Dolly's little thin face grew pink, "O—h!" she said softly.

"I don't know just where your brother is. I must look it up. He may be right across the New Hampshire line."

"He is away up in the northern part." The pink faded. "Never mind, we shall be nearer than when I was down in Prattsboro."

The child wagged her head delightedly, while Polly wondered what kind of brother this was to hold such a place in his little sister's heart. If he were all that Dolly believed him to be, she should like to know him.

The wind died and the air grew warm. Jozy and Esther on the back seat were asleep.

"What time is it?" Polly turned to Lilith. "We are pretty near Springfield."

"Quarter of twelve."

"Almost time for dinner. We'll be on the lookout for a shady spot."

"I'm famished," declared Lilith. "Is n't that tree big enough?"

"No," Polly laughed. "If I remember, there is a bit of shade this side of Northampton."

"Do hurry up, then, for I'm sure the tots are starving."

"Are you hungry, dear?" Polly smiled down at Dolly.

"Not much."

"Hear that! Where is the lunch basket?" Lilith peered down over the back of her seat. "I believe you hid it away! I don't see anything familiar."

Polly looked mischievous. "There are chicken sandwiches and cream-cheese sandwiches and chocolate snaps and oranges and coffee and — "

"Oh!" Lilith clapped her hands to her ears. "Is n't she naughty, Dolly?"

"No," answered Dolly; "she could n't be — ever."

"You see, I have a stanch champion," Polly twinkled.

"Oh, yes," sighed Lilith in mock distress, "everybody swears allegiance to you. I foresee what lonesome days I am going to have up on the mountain."

Dolly was looking at the girl with a puzzled expression. Lilith's face was perfectly serious.

"I love you too," she said sweetly.

"Bless her little heart!" cried Lilith. "You and I are going to have a lovely time at Overlook, are n't we?"

"Yes, Miss Lilith," answered Dolly, yet this was becoming even more perplexing. Had n't she just said —

Lilith was watching her. "Did you think I was in earnest?" she smiled. "That's the way Polly and I amuse ourselves. I was only joking. I am delighted to have everybody love Polly."

At which the little face grew bright again.

"There!" exclaimed Lilith; "a tree! a tree! — it's dinner-time!"

Polly speeded up the car and whizzed by the designated shrub.

"Oh, I say" — and the jester was serious this time — "let me out at that little tea-room or tavern or whatever — honest, Polly, I mean it!"

So the car stopped, and the girl disappeared inside the door. Soon she came out, her hands full of ice-cream cones which she served to her fellow-passengers and then ran back for more.

Russell drew up beside Polly and leaped out, to follow Lilith. Dr. Abbe was not far behind, and the three returned with more cones, running back and forth until all were supplied.

It was a happy thought of Lilith's, for the children were in ecstasies, and the icy sweets were grateful to everybody. Dr. Abbe and Russell lingered by Polly's car, the children on the back seat eating and chattering by turns. Suddenly Little Duke's voice piped high above the others'.

"Oh! it's awful hot; but My has n't sweat a hair!"

Those on the front seat laughed slyly.

"Pretty good," observed Russell softly.

"Amusing little fellow," returned Dr. Abbe in the same tone.

Polly glanced behind. Little Duke, all unconscious of the notice, was engaged in examining his suit of new tan linen which was his especial admiration. Finding it still immaculate, he resumed his ice-cream, remarking, "If My should get a drop on this, it would be enough to drive the angels to drink."

Russell grinned, Dr. Abbe's lips puckered, Lilith laughed into her handkerchief, while Polly whirled her back towards the small boy, and chuckled.

"You seem to be in a fair way to have plenty of entertainment," observed Russell.

"This goes a little ahead of our regular everyday kind," returned Polly; "but there's always enough to keep us cheerful."

"It is well we did n't wait for a woodsy dining-room," declared Polly, when they were again racing northward. "It does n't look as if we'd find one very soon."

It grew hotter and hotter. Polly drove faster.

"There's a lovely place this side of South Deerfield," observed Lilith. "We're nearly there, I think. Tired, Dolly dear?"

"Some," she answered softly, with a little wan smile.

"We're going to have dinner," cried Polly gayly, speeding her car. "Look ahead! See that little

wood — that's where we're going to stop." And almost as she spoke the place was reached.

"Oh, how beautiful!" breathed Dolly.

The four cars drew up on the grass beside the road, lunch boxes were opened, and very shortly everybody was eating and drinking, the grown-ups taking only hurried nibbles until most of the children had a glass of milk in one hand and a chicken sandwich in the other. All felt the refreshment of the cool, green dining-room. The young men poured the ice-cold coffee and lemonade, the girls handed out sandwiches and cookies, oranges and small cakes, until weariness and heat were forgotten, and everybody was in gay morning mood.

There was not much to pack away into basket and box when the luncheon was over, only a few cookies and bottles of milk, in case of need later in the day.

Just as they were ready to start on again, Polly called Dr. Abbe.

He came as if on wings. "At your service," he bowed.

"Would you mind letting Dolly go to sleep in your arms?" she asked. "I think she will be easier there."

"I shall be glad to take her," was his assurance.

"You might change places with one or two of the children here on the back seat," Polly suggested, noticing the little maid's troubled face.

"Then Dolly will be right with me when she wakes up."

The exchange was quickly made, and on went the cars, on and on, through wide farm lands, beside gurgling streams and quiet lakes. They whirled into pretty villages and out, ran along the foot of hills and skirted deep ravines, where down, down, down, a brook was singing. The mountains drew closer and climbed nearer the clouds. But only the grown people saw and enjoyed it all, for the children, to the very last one, had fallen fast asleep.

They had passed through Brattleboro and were following the winding river when — bang!

There was an instant outcry, and everybody that was awake peered out to discover the trouble. It was one of Russell's tires that was responsible for the spoiling of so many naps, and at once his coat was off and he was getting out his tools, begging the rest to go on and promising to follow as soon as possible. But the road was shady and the cars came to a halt, John and Charley running to help with the injured tire.

The little folks in Russell's car were in mild excitement, watching proceedings with great interest. The less fortunate ones, after vainly craning their necks and being unable to get a satisfactory view of the scene, gave themselves up to conversing with their neighbors or finishing their interrupted naps.

"I say, it's a good time for a lunch —" began Polly.

"Oh!" — "Oh, do, Miss Dudley!" — "I'm hungrier than anything!" — "What are we goin' to have?" — "Oh, my! are we goin' to have ice-cream?"

"We're going to have cookies and milk," replied Polly. And she began fishing out the cakes from a deep bag.

The little folks were all wide awake at once, including Dolly Merrifield, who looked as fresh as need be.

Polly and Dr. Abbe walked over to the workers where John, driver of the truck, was pumping. "It was good of you to hold Dolly all this time," said the girl. "Is n't she a darling?"

"She is," he answered. And then they fell to talking of the little maid and what they hoped the outing would do for her.

The tire was in place, the men were putting on their coats. "Whew, but it's hot!" ejaculated Russell, wiping his forehead with his grimy handkerchief. "I supposed my tires were in good con—"

"Bang!"

There was a scream from Polly's car, a series of screams, and she and the Doctor ran ahead together. The rest came up.

"Don't be frightened, dears! It's only a tire."

"I thought I was shot!" wailed Jozy. "So did I!" chimed in Grissel.

The others laughed.

"Pretty big blow-out," said Russell. He pulled off his coat that was on only one arm.

Dr. Abbe regarded it ruefully. "Wish I knew how to help," he said.

"It's a shame—" began Polly.

"It's fine," returned Russell; "I'm glad to have a change from driving. They've chosen a good, shady spot for it. And the tools are out—all handy." He ran back for them.

They went at the work good-humoredly, and presently the new tire was on, and they were ready to start.

"Miss Dudley," began Jozy, a little shyly, "would you mind — may — may — "

"Well, what is it?" urged Polly, one foot on the running-board.

"May I—" Jozy began again,—"do you mind if Grissel and me sit in the other car — the big car?"

"For what?" asked Polly in astonishment.

Jozy did n't answer.

Grissel's courage leapt forward. "We want to sit in that," she pointed, "so's — so's to be there when it goes off."

Polly gave a little shriek of laughter, in which Dr. Abbe joined.

The children looked a bit shame-faced; they did not see anything funny. Russell was only a few steps away. He turned back questioningly.

"Jozy and Grissel want to sit in the Gresham

car, so as to be on the spot when that takes its turn at popping!"

Russell shouted, and Jozy began to cry.

"Beg pardon, mesdemoiselles," smiled Russell with a low bow; "but" — glancing at the others — "that is a good one!"

Grissel's lip went up, and she hid her face in her elbow.

"Come, come," coaxed Polly, "there's nothing to cry about. We don't expect any more punctures, so you'd better stay where you are." She waved Russell off and settled herself at the wheel.

"What magnificent ferns!" It was Dr. Abbe's tribute to the mountain road.

"Are n't they beautiful!" responded Lilith. "Polly says it looks as if somebody had been decorating for a wedding."

The Doctor laughed — and blushed.

"I wonder if he is going to be married," thought Lilith.

The way wound up and up; but No. 45678 took the steep grade ascent without flinching, and at least one of the party thought Polly managed her car exceedingly well. As they mounted higher and still higher, occasional breaks in the leafy roadsides drew forth exclamations of surprise and admiration from the travelers big and little.

Russell drove up alongside the car ahead.

"Say," he called, "this is great! Why did n't you tell a fellow we were bound for the clouds?"

"I thought you knew," returned Polly. "I'm glad you like it."

"Like it!" Russell took off his hat, and gazed down the valley. "It makes a man feel pretty small," he said.

Near at hand lay rolling, pine-scattered pastures, with now and then a cultivated field or fruited orchard. Farther on, the little town of Overlook stretched itself in a long line from the wooded north to the open south, where shining pleasure cars ran in and out of the covered bridge that spanned the village brook, looking like children's toys that could rest in the palm of one's hand. Beyond stood the green hills, with an occasional white farmhouse or a parti-colored bungalow, and then range upon range of hazy mountains until they melted into the sky.

On and on went the little procession, up between pines and birches and maples, where bushes hung thick with ripening berries, and finally into the open, leaving weather-worn farmhouses on right and left. Rocky pastures where herds were feeding, orchards whose trees bent with their burden of green fruit, meadows yellow with "butter and eggs" and kingcups; these came into view and disappeared.

"There is the site of the old town," said Polly, waving her hand toward a field of tall grass on her right. "Nearly one hundred years ago Overlook was moved down into the valley, and small stones

mark the location of its principal buildings. See that monument over there? That is where the court-house stood. Have n't you noticed, along the roadside, occasional little numbered granite stones?"

"Yes, and I wondered what they were for," answered Dr. Abbe.

"Each marks the site of some house; it tells on the monument what they were."

Everybody looked until the spot was left well behind and a bungalow came into view.

"That is n't ours," said Polly. "We are going farther to the left. It won't look familiar even to me, for they are putting on a new piazza and a sleeping-porch — unless they've finished them already."

"I see it!" cried Lilith. "And I do believe Benedicta is out watching for us."

She was. And with outspread arms she received them all, her homely face one big welcoming smile.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST DAY

A HALF-DOZEN wheel-chair girls and boys were ranged along the wide veranda, all smilingly alert to their new surroundings.

Polly, seated on the top step of the stairs that faced the south, looked dreamily off to the hills — thinking of David.

Russell Ely came suddenly into her line of vision, and her eyes followed him, a trim young figure in the morning sunshine.

"Hullo!" he called presently, "come and show me the rest of it!"

"I can't," Polly answered. "Dr. Abbe will take you all over."

He came nearer.

"I did n't ask Dr. Abbe," he objected quietly; "I asked you."

Polly smiled and moved nearer the post as he dropped to the step beside her.

"I have to stay with the children," she explained.

"All the time?" queried the young man.

"Nearly."

He shook his head. "Don't believe I'd like it."

"It is much more satisfactory," she returned, "than watching time all day."

Russell looked at her keenly; but her eyes still kept to the hills.

"Miss Dudley, what does that mean?" Grissel pointed upward, stretching sidewise in a vain attempt to see the words over the entrance.

"Oh! 'Sunrise Chalet'?"

"Yes'm — I mean, Miss Dudley. Clementina said it was 'Sunrise something' — she did n't know what."

"It is the name of the house," Polly explained. "All the houses up here have names or inscriptions. We'll go to see them some day."

"What do they have 'em for?" persisted Grissel. "And what does 'shallay' mean?"

"I'll tell you all about it, honey," broke in Benedicta, appearing in the doorway. She moved a chair towards the child, and sat in it, pulling her sleeves down and buttoning them about her wrists.

"You see, my Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé who live here were part Swiss and part Scotch. Their pa was a Swiss gentleman, a descendant of the great patriot, Mr. Arnold von Winkelried, and their ma was a Scotland girl, and they lived in a shally in Switzerland till their pa passed over. Then their ma, bein' raised in Scotland, begun to hanker after the heather — that's a little pink flower — or sometimes white. Wal, back she went, and it kicked up a prodigious muss with their pa's brother, and the joke of it is, their uncle — the

old bach, him who's just gone — procrastinated one day too many and passed over sudden, without a will, and my Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé possess all that property! They inhabited Scotland as long as their ma lived; then they came out to New York and sojourned there until Mr. Aimé got to be a lawyer and my Miss Flora learned to be a beautiful singer — oh, you ought to hear her! I don't ever expect to hear anybody sing like her till I get to heaven. My, can't she sing! Wal, where was I? Oh, yes! They wanted to be out in God's country, and they built here. They had an appalling time gettin' somebody to do their cookin' till I come — that was five years ago, when my twin passed over. My twin — his name was Benedict — lived down the mountain a piece, and after his wife was gone I resided with him and took care of the kids. Ben was always grumpy and he kep' sayin' he was going pretty quick, pretty quick, and one day I said I sh'd think he'd try to hold on a while longer, funerals were so inordinately expensive just then, and he said he did n't see much use in waitin' when anybody felt as bad as he did. But I could see he exhilarated up a bit, and he stayed quite a period after that. My Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé came for me before he passed over; but I said no, I'd stay till he got through. After a while he had a stroke, and we buried him right out front. Maybe you saw it comin' up. . . . Yes, a little brown house with a

red barn alongside of it and the graves across the road. That's the place. My nephew, Young Ben, sojourns there now. I get all our milk of him. He's got three Guernsey cows, and they're amazin' healthy — sinners and snobs! I forgot!"

Benedicta ran a short race with time, and won, for her voice came back to them, "Ain't I the lucky one! A minute more, and they'd been goners sure!"

"Say!" Clementina pulled Polly's sleeve, "Miss Dudley, when she comes back, you shut her off! I want to talk."

Polly shook her head soberly, though Russell's eyes were dancing, and the next moment Benedicta returned and with no word of explanation resumed her story.

"Wal, let's see, where was I? Oh, yes, to go back to my Miss Flora! One day before they put up that shally sign over the door I was tellin' her how I always looked up to this house soon as I got out o' bed, for the sun showed right here first of any locality on the mountain. You see, this is a mite the highest situation, anyway, and it touches up the chimney first and then the roof before it hits anywhere else, 'cept some of the trees back. And I remember now how my Miss Flora leaped up and clapped her hands and cried, 'Aimé, Aimé! come here quick!' He was establishin' a flower bed down there, and he came right off, and she said, 'I've got it! I've got it!' 'Got what?' he

asked, calm as a violet. 'The name — "Sunrise Chalet"! Is n't that the very thing!' Of course, he said yes — he always chimed straight in with her, whatever. And if they did n't have it up soon as ever they could get it done! And there it's been ever since."

"And I can't see it!" mourned Grissel.

Russell sprang to his feet, but Benedicta was ahead of him. Taking the child in her strong arms she descended the steps and faced the veranda.

"That looks nice," commented the little girl, wagging her head happily. "Now take me to see the others," she demanded.

"Why, Grissel!" reproved Polly.

"Well, I want to see 'em," she explained.

"That is n't the way to ask. Besides, you are too heavy for Benedicta."

"Pshaw, she ain't weightier 'n a hummin'-bird," scorned the woman. She was already marching off across the lawn.

Polly shook her head. "If she lets them impose upon her this way," she said in a soft tone, "she'll have her hands full."

"Suppose we follow on," Russell suggested. "Can't any of your kids walk?"

"Some of them a short distance; but I can't go now."

"Why not? I'll shoulder one; the rest can't run away — that's an advantage."

"Lilith will show you about," said Polly. "Shall I call her?"

"Thank you," he smiled politely, shaking his head; then, with a twinkling "I can find my own way," he picked up the girl in the next chair and started on a run towards the invisible bungalows.

Going inside, Polly met Mrs. Daybill and Lilith coming downstairs.

"Benedicta and Russell have started on a western pilgrimage — you'd better go, too. And do you mind taking Esther and Timmy along? It won't hurt them to walk as far as the Sandfords' and the Temples', will it?" addressing the White Nurse.

"I don't know how far that is; but a little walk will do them good. What's the matter with your going?"

"Not this morning. I've promised Russell to go over to Sally's with him after dinner."

"All right for this once," laughed Mrs. Daybill; "but it is not to be 'You go and I'll stay behind' all summer, remember."

It was nearly five o'clock when Polly and Russell bade good-bye to Sally on the steps of the Robinsons' pretty bungalow.

Some distance away Polly turned to look back at the inscription which ran across the gable:

THE HILLS REJOICE ON EVERY SIDE

"That is the best I have seen yet," said Russell.

"I love it," returned Polly "I think I'll borrow it for the little house I mean to build up here some day."

"'Up here' is wonderful," responded the young man. "I wish I were going to stay."

"Oh, do! You can help us take care of the kiddies."

He laughed and shook his head. "Guess not this time; but I will run up again for some week-end, if you would like me to."

"Of course, we should. We'd be glad to see you any time."

"I am not much interested in the 'we,' but if *you* want me to come, I will come. Do you want me, Polly?"

"Certainly I do. Why should n't I?"

"Well, I did n't know. I am not sure about it now."

"You foolish boy! As if I would n't ! What possible reason could I have for not wishing you to come?"

Russell grew grave. He turned and looked squarely into Polly's eyes, looked until the brown eyes wondered — half understood — and fell away from the passionate gaze.

"Don't be silly!" she said.

Then all the man in him burst forth.

"Is it silly to love you, Polly Dudley? to wish to be with you? to covet the right to give you every-

thing that can add to your pleasure and happiness? to long to hold you in my arms and to call you my wife? Is that silliness? If it is, I plead guilty."

Polly did not look up. The red burned in her cheeks and crept up under the little curls that fell over her forehead.

"I suppose I am a fool," Russell went on. "First, to come up here at all, and then to blurt out like this, when I had made up my mind to wait. But, of course, you've seen all along how it was, ever since — why, ever since the first day I saw you at high school, away back when we were kids. But David Collins was always in my way. How I longed to knock him aside! You have seen it all — have n't you, Polly?"

A tiny shake of the drooping head.

"I don't understand how you could help seeing — only you were never the girl to imagine every fellow in love with you that happened to wish you good-morning."

There was a moment's silence. Presently he asked, "Have n't you a single word for me, Polly?"

Even then she did not speak at once. Finally the answer came.

"I am sorry, Russell — oh, I'm so sorry! I never dreamed it!" She glanced up, and the eyes that looked into his were mournful.

He drew a deep breath. "Don't grieve over it,

Polly. I ought to have known how it would be. It's all right." He was looking straight ahead, and his voice seemed far away. "I hoped you did care for me — a little; but if you — do not — " The words suddenly halted.

"I am afraid you don't quite understand. I like you, Russell, I have always liked you; but — there is David!"

"Polly!" He stared at her in amazement. "Surely you do not care for David Collins — after his abominable treatment of you! It is unbelievable."

A sad little smile fluttered over Polly's face. "I do love him just as well as ever I did. Those things — happened because he was jealous — and angry. I told him that I could have nothing more to do with him until he would trust me — that's all. I suppose he is n't ready to trust me yet."

Russell shook his head. "I see," he said grimly. "Forgive me, Polly. I supposed that all was over between you and David. I have made a mess of it."

"No, no!" Polly hastened to say. "I'm only sorry that you — you — feel as you do. We have always been such good friends."

He looked down at her with a little sad, tender smile. "And we will" — there was the hint of a break — "be good friends still, won't we, Polly?"

CHAPTER XVI

BENEDICTA MAKES IT GO

SAY, Miss Polly, I wish you'd let me run that machine o' yours."

The girl turned from her Singer with a welcoming smile.

"Why, I will, Benedicta. I'll teach you any time. It is n't much to learn. Or if you want some stitching done, I'll do it for you gladly."

"Mercy, no!" laughed the housekeeper. "I manipulated that long before you was born — I mean, one just like it. What I'm yearning for is to be sittin' up in your chariot, makin' it go like the dickens."

"My car? — Oh!" gasped Polly. "I thought you meant this."

"Don't you s'pose I c'u'd learn? Or would you be afraid I'd spile it?"

"No, indeed! you would n't hurt the car — unless you should take a flying leap down to Overlook village."

"Guess I won't cut up no such idiot caper as that," laughed Benedicta. "But, my! if I could make it go, I'd be so imperious you'd think I belonged to the court of Spain."

Polly chuckled. "It is easy enough to make it

go," she said, "but somewhat of a stunt to get to where you can keep it under perfect control. Still, you are quick of thought and have a level head; I don't doubt you can make a good driver. The only trouble is, you are so fearless you might take risks; that is n't wise. You and I will go out this afternoon and see what we can do, unless you are too tired when you get through with your work."

"Tired!" sniffed Benedicta.

"Are n't you — ever?" questioned Polly.

"Oh, I get weary occasionally; but gen'ally I keep goin'."

"And you never feel that you cannot stand up another minute?"

"Yere, once in a while I do."

"What then?"

"Wal," said Benedicta slowly, "if I c'n see a place where I c'n set down, I set. But if I can't, I just smile and go it."

"Smile?"

"Yere. Don't seem as if smilin' would help out so much, but it does. Smilin' is amazin'ly restful."

"I wonder if that is how you can do so much work," marveled Polly. "If it is, I think I will smile."

"Sinners and snobs! when don't you smile? Telegraph me when ye ain't goin' to — I'd like to be there. I'll have to come by lightnin', though."

She left Polly laughing, and went to finish mopping the balcony floor.

"Benedicta and I are going down to Overlook," was all Polly told of their plans as they set off at three o'clock.

"May n't Grissel and I go?" begged Clementina coaxingly.

"Not to-day, dearie," was the brief answer. And Lilith, as well as the children, was surprised and a bit disappointed in view of the empty back seat. Hitherto it had been contrary to the principles of No. 45678 to run to Overlook or anywhere else with only two passengers.

On the level road leading through Overlook, Benedicta received her preliminary instructions and took the steering-wheel in her strong hands. She succeeded in driving the car slowly and jerkily for several rods and presently stopped with a sudden bump. Being convinced that the machine was safely at rest, she leaned back and drew a long, delighted breath.

"Shudders and shades!" she ejaculated; "be I still on terra firma? Ain't it fun! But it's deliriously ticklish."

Polly laughed. "You like it, then?"

"Like it! It's the topgallantest play I ever tried! To think I made it go — me!"

"You did pretty well for the first time," commended Polly.

"I should say so!" gasped Benedicta. "I never anticipated that runnin' this chariot was so perturbative."

"Dear, dear!" laughed Polly; "what big words you do use! You take my breath away."

"Teeters and tongs!" exclaimed Benedicta scornfully, "if you think I use lengthy words, you ought to hear Mr. Aimé talk. His are the grandest I ever heard. My Miss Flora laughs at him and says he swallowed the dictionary when he was three and has been spouting it up ever since. But I told him I adored his kind of talk, and from that if he did n't begin to learn — I mean, 'teach' — me some of his stretched-out words, and I put 'em down so I can look 'em over once in a while. But I can't hold a spark to him. I forget 'em so. Seem's if my memory bag must be made of open-work, for there's always something slippin' out. But, my! what an improvident mortal I be — gabbin' this way when I ought to be drivin' the chariot! What do I do to start — oh, yes, I know!"

Polly nodded assent to her questioning glance, and again they whirled along the smooth road.

Late in the afternoon Polly drove back up the mountain; but when they were nearly within sight of home Benedicta begged so earnestly to announce her new achievement in her own way, that finally she was allowed to take the wheel.

"I want to sweep up to the house in one glorious curve," she exulted. "Won't they be surprised!"

So intent was the driver upon the little veranda group that she nearly forgot her part in

the affair. The machine wabbled along in a most inglorious way, tilted into a gully beside the road, and began slipping slowly downhill.

"Put your foot on the brake!" cried Polly, grasping the emergency lever and forcing it back.

The car meekly stopped.

"Sinners and snobs!" exclaimed Benedicta. "And I'm the sinner! — and the snob too! Let me get out! Let me get out!"

"Never mind," comforted Polly; "sit still and turn the car into the road — you can do it. Put your foot — "

But Benedicta was on the ground, and running towards the kitchen door.

Polly drove the car into the garage and then followed the disquieted housekeeper.

CHAPTER XVII

A PICTURE AND A MESSAGE

THREE weeks had wrought encouraging changes among the small patients on Overlook Mountain, changes visible not alone to professional eyes. Little Duke was growing so plump that "Grocer Jack," who brought up daily supplies from the village, and who was as lank as the proverbial beanpole, declared that he was coming up to board with Benedicta. Clementina Cunio was able to walk a full half-mile to one of the neighboring farmhouses without exhaustion, where the good wife always welcomed her with eager arms, never omitting the important word that she believed she grew strong every minute. Timmy Dennis and Jeffy Orton, who down in Fair Harbor had been too weak more than mildly to admire the multi-colored marbles that Mrs. Gresham had given them, were now really shooting them in the very latest fashion on the gravel walk and running in at nap-time or between games to tell of some passer-by who had stopped to compliment their playing, as well as to speak of their wonderful gain in appearance. As for Esther and Dolly Merrifield, their cheeks were now as pink as apple-blossoms, and the numerous visitors from

cabins and bungalows thereabouts rejoiced talkatively over the rosy changes in the hitherto little pale faces. So, as appetites and happiness increased, those in charge said to one another what a fortunate thing it was that the children had come up to Overlook.

It was towards the end of the third week that Clementina came in from the veranda to tell of a traveling photographer who was outside and who wished to photograph them.

"An' he'll take us all at the same time," went on the excited child, "an' he won't charge but one dollar an' he'll make 'em beautiful an' we c'n send 'em home to our folks he says an' we'll make a lovely picture an' it'll be grand an' won't you Miss Dudley?"

Clementina stopped for lack of breath, whereupon Polly said she would see, and outdoors they went, the little girl holding fast to the hand that clasped hers in so reassuring a way.

Polly and the traveling photographer talked together for quite a little while — or rather the photographer talked and Polly bowed her head or shook it or said simply, "Yes," and "I think so," and such inconsequential things. Then, the main question seemingly having been decided, they walked about in front of the chalet, stopping at every few feet to look towards the veranda and making various motions with their hands.

"What are they doing?" fretted Clementina.

"Don't you s'pose she's going to have us tooken?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Dolly Merrifield, as the question was addressed to no one in particular. "I think they are finding the right place to take it in."

"Oh!" cried Clementina rapturously, "I bet that's it."

And all the little faces on the veranda reflected Clementina's.

"We're going to be took playin' marbles!" announced Timmy Dennis.

"Yes, playin' marbles!" echoed Jeffy.

"I'm going to get my doll, so's she can be tooken too!" exclaimed Chessera.

"Maybe she won't let you," suggested Clementina.

"Maybe she will!" retorted Chessera, who never held any doubts concerning Polly.

Meantime, several matters having been satisfactorily settled, the two that had been considering them came up on the veranda. Then Polly went into the house, and returned with Lilith and the White Nurse. Shortly afterwards Benedicta appeared and ran across the lawn to the Study, coming back with a boy in her arms and Dr. Abbe just behind with another.

It was an excited little company that was grouped on the grass against a background of shrubbery. Wheel-chairs and small chairs were carried out and moved from place to place, in

order to obtain the best effect. At last everybody was ready, with his very best smile or his most happy expression, according to whether he was grown up or only five or ten or anywhere between. The little folks were told to keep perfectly still, the photographer waited the fraction of a minute for the sun to hide his face under the edge of a white cloud, and then — click! — the picture was taken.

What a Babel of tongues was set loose as soon as the word of release was given! The children all talked at once, and the grown-ups smiled to one another and hoped that "it" was good.

After a long week the finished photographs came, and the children promptly went into a flutter of ecstasy and did not come out until the next morning. Then before they were dressed they had to take two rapt glances at "the picture," the first to make sure that it had not grown wings overnight, and then to see if it were really as beautiful as it had been when they went to bed.

It was a fine photograph; even the grown-ups admitted that. Everybody was in it, from Benedicta Clapperton down to Baby Zulette. The little folks had obeyed to the letter all the warnings to be motionless, and the result was a perfect likeness of every small face. As for the others, they agreed that all excepting his own were as good as such pictures could well be; so everybody was satisfied — including the photographer himself.

"If I only had three," wished Dolly Merrifield to Polly, "then I could send one to Sardis and one to auntie and keep one myself."

Polly said she thought it could be arranged with only one, for it could be sent first to Aunt Sophie and then she could send it to Sardis, and after he had looked at it long enough he could return it to her.

Dolly was delighted with this plan, and before many days it was put into action. Aunt Sophie wrote a very happy letter, telling how glad she was to see the photograph and that she had already sent it to Sardis. Then Dolly tried to calculate how many days must go by before it would return from her brother. She could not tell, but finally decided that she should have to wait at least a week.

"I know he'll like it," she told Polly, "only I do want to hear what he says — he never says things like other folks."

The letter from Sardis came in exactly five days, and Dolly's eyes grew big and bright as it was put into her small hand. As she read, the smiles grew, until there was a joyous little laugh. She looked up to meet Polly's happy eyes.

"Oh, Miss Dudley, what do you think! He's coming up here to see us! And he says he'll stay all night if you'll lend him a bit of turf, about six feet square, to sleep on. Is n't that just like Sardis! And he says the picture is beautiful, and mine

looks as if I were having a mighty good time, and that you — I told him which you were — that you look as if you would n't whip me more than twice a day! Whip me twice a day!" The red lips curled themselves whimsically. "That's just like Sardis! You want him to come, don't you, Miss Dudley?" questioned Dolly anxiously.

"Indeed, I do," Polly answered. "You can tell him that I shall be delighted to see him up here on top of the world, and that he may have six feet of turf or six feet of springs to sleep on, whichever he chooses, and that if he will send us word what train he will take we shall be very glad to meet him at Overlook."

And that is the message which Sardis Merrifield read, two nights afterward, in the murky post-office of Raineville, when he stopped for his mail after a thirty-mile drive in the rain, to see a sick parishioner.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ATTEMPT AT MATCHMAKING

THE children were having their early tea as John Eustis and his sister drove up to the door of Sunrise Chalet.

"Did n't you get our telegram?" asked Kate, when Polly expressed her surprise. "John telegraphed the first thing this morning, as soon as we decided to come. You see," turning to her brother, "it would have been surer to telephone, as mother suggested; but, never mind, we're here! And, Polly, if you have n't enough to eat, just send John down to Overlook for supplies."

"Yes," laughed John, with a mischievous glance in Polly's direction, "I can bring up some raspberry ice and cream puffs for you, and that will save all the other things for the rest of us."

It was a standing joke among Kate's friends, her readiness at any time to forego substantial food for raspberry ice and cream puffs; so now Polly chuckled at John's sally, but not at all to her friend's discomfiture.

"Oh, you may laugh!" she retorted cheerfully; "but I warn you I am not going home till I have had my fill of Benedicta's wonderful muffins and stuffed beefsteak and custard pie and blueberry

cakes and chicken turnovers. There, I've ordered my meals! Now you can give me what you please."

Polly made a smiling response, though in a little dismay she silently ran over their stock of eatables and wondered if Kate's suggestion might not hold a hint of truth. She decided, however, that nothing more would be absolutely needed before Monday morning, when the grocer would be there.

Sally Robinson was with the young people at Sunrise Chalet much of the time during the visitors' stay, and wherever they were there were also good-fellowship and mirth. Nobody could have guessed that Polly's thoughts were often far away from the little group of merrymakers. She found herself almost constantly wondering how it was with Patricia, and if John really did care for her. She fancied that she might find out if she could see him alone; but there never seemed to be any chance for that.

Sunday morning the party drove down to the little Overlook church, and after dinner they strolled down the mountain, pairing off as young folks will. Polly wished that John would drop behind to her; but he walked beside Sally. Lilith was with Dr. Abbe, while Polly and Kate kept together at the side of the woodsy road and talked of happenings at Fair Harbor during the last few weeks.

Suddenly Lilith, who had climbed a high bank to pick some late raspberries, made a misstep. She

clutched at the thorny bushes, but down the incline she rolled, tearing both hands and clothing. In the confusion Polly found herself beside John; nevertheless, when it was discovered that Lilith was not injured beyond a few scratches, and the party walked on again, he returned to Sally.

At this, Polly marveled not a little. It was clear to her that John was either uncommonly devoted to Sally or positively avoiding herself. Which was it? She could not decide. She had staked her hopes upon the chance of talking with him this afternoon, and now it would soon be time for their return. Without doubt her opportunity was gone. Why could n't he have fallen in with her plans! Poor Patricia! Well, perhaps she had better give up her attempts at matchmaking.

In the same order the party walked back to the house for tea and then spent the evening at Sally's home. It was hard for Polly to overcome her disappointment.

After breakfast Kate went to bid Sally good-bye and returned almost at once in some excitement.

"They want me to stay the week out at least!" she cried delightedly. "You won't mind going back alone, shall you, John? And I can go home by train."

"What a fine time I shall have, with nobody to talk to me all day long!" he exclaimed mockingly.

"Well, it is shabby to make you go that lonely road without a soul to keep you company," she

confessed in contrition; "but I do so want to stay over — oh, I say, Polly can ride down to Overlook with you! That will be something, and she said she had got to go down to-day — did n't you, Polly?"

For one instant Polly's eyes lighted; then, as suddenly, they were dulled by a shadow. In that brief time she had seen the face of John Eustis change from dismay to smiling courtesy.

"He does n't want me," was the girl's humiliating thought, and she spoke out quickly, halting the seemingly eager words upon the man's lips.

"Oh, no, I can't go this morning! It is impossible!"

"Do come! I wish you would," John made response.

"How am I to get home?" Polly smiled.

"Oh, how stupid of me!" scowled Kate. Then she brightened. "Why can't you ride up with the grocer?"

"He must be far on his route by this time. No, there is n't any way for me to get back — unless I walk," she laughed.

John looked troubled. What was it? Polly could not tell.

"I wonder if — " he began.

"Teeters and tongs!" broke in Benedicta from the kitchen; "you go right along, Miss Polly! I'll drive down after yer soon's I get my work done."

"Why, can you drive the car?" exclaimed Kate.

"Sure!" scorned the woman.

"I'm almost afraid to let you," demurred Polly. "You've never been down alone — excepting once."

"If I can't manipulate that chariot, we'll go deviltydamn together," announced Benedicta.

Three minutes later Lilith was upstairs helping Polly dress for her ride.

Polly stopped suddenly, her frock half on — stopped with an air of finality.

"I'm not going! Will you take my place?"

"Why, of course not! What should I do with John Eustis on my hands for an hour?"

Polly laughed at Lilith's look of despair. "Talk to him — just as I'd have to. And he does n't want me. You know he does n't — you saw that."

"I did n't see anything of the kind — when?" Lilith looked her astonishment.

"When Kate suggested my going — of course, you saw it!"

"I did n't. 'T was only your imagination. He urged you to go."

"Oh, yes, he could n't help it!" She hesitated. "I will not go!" she declared.

Yet when the car was at the door she ran downstairs in her pretty pink-and-white gingham, as smilingly fresh and happy as if she had never had a trouble or a perplexing problem.

Lilith looked upon her with wonder and admiration. She wished that she could veil her heart so easily. Polly had herself well under control, there was no doubt about that.

After the chatter of leave-taking both the driver and his companion said little. To be sure, John was seldom very talkative; but Polly was not given to long silences, and now she wondered whether she had better let John have his way or break into his thoughts with commonplaces. In his present mood she hardly dared attempt any reference to the matter which lay closest the door of her heart.

But after waiting in vain for John to speak she grew impatient and began to talk quite casually about the large crop of blackberries apparent on the sides of the road.

At once John came out of his abstraction — if abstraction it was — and they fell into easy conversation.

Soon Polly became bolder. "I hope Patricia will come up while the berries are at their best," she said, furtively watching her companion. "She delights in them. I wish she were here now."

"I wish she were," echoed John fervently — "this very minute!" He was gazing straight ahead, his face set in stern lines.

This was so unexpected as for a moment to throw Polly off her balance; but she quickly recovered herself. Here was her opportunity! She must not lose it.

"John," she began, with a hint of hesitation, "I have been wanting to speak to you about Patricia. You know, she is n't happy."

He bowed slightly without turning.

"Of course, it is not my business — and, yet, in one sense it is, for Patty is very dear to me. It was hard to see her as she was when I came away."

He did not help her with any response, and she went on.

"If there has been a — I mean, some little misunderstanding, maybe I could be of use to you in setting things right."

He turned to her now in such obvious astonishment that her eyes widened.

"Me?" he questioned — "'be of use' to *me?* I don't know what you mean."

She gazed at him blankly. Had she made some dreadful blunder? Or was he feigning innocence of the whole affair?

"Why, John," she said quickly, "you can't deny that you and Patricia are — or, at least, have been — interested in each other, can you?"

"We may as well talk plain English," he answered. "If you mean to ask if she is in love with me, I can tell you emphatically that she is not."

"Oh, John, that is only your mistake! I was afraid that was the trouble."

"Now, see here, Polly, I happen to know that Patricia Illingworth does n't care the ghost of a pin about me, and never did — any more than I care for her. I like her, but like is n't love. She and Houghton Swift have had a quarrel — "

"Houghton Swift!" gasped Polly — "Oh!"

"Yes, Houghton Swift. I think it is coming out all right — looks that way — wish I could be as sure of something else."

He was staring down the road now, his hands gripping the wheel. Polly could see his fingers tighten their hold.

"I'm ashamed to have made such a stupid blunder," she began. "I thought — "

They had rounded a curve, and the car had come to a stop on a level stretch between the tall pines. John Eustis was bending towards her. It was doubtful that he had heard a word of her half-spoken apology.

"Polly," he said, "if I had not believed that I was master of myself I should not have come up here. I had decided against it, and then Kate urged me, and I yielded. I soon found how things were going with me, and yesterday I kept as far away from you as I well could; then this morning Kate muddled up matters and — I beg your pardon — now you have most unconsciously spurred me on — until I must speak! Polly, I want you! Do you love me, Polly? Have you held off, believing that I belonged to Patricia? Have you, Polly?"

The girl sat like one struck dumb. This sudden revelation, so utterly unforeseen, had left her white and rigid, her eyes filled to the brim with pain.

"Polly, tell me that you love me! Tell me!" he pleaded.

Something like a sob broke from her lips, and she uttered a little moan.

"I see," he said unsteadily — "I see! You have no need to speak. I suppose I could have seen before if I had not been blind."

"There is — David, you know," Polly said softly.

"David!" he echoed scornfully; "always David! Forgive me. I knew this was no time for speaking, so soon after — " He stopped abruptly. "But why will you let that fellow spoil your life? You don't really love him! I doubt if you ever did."

"John Eustis! You don't know what you are saying!" Polly's voice held a mixture of fire and tears.

"I know he is n't worthy of you," he replied fiercely. "There he is, up in that camp, gallanting all the girls for miles around, and leaving you to eat your heart out — you, worth the whole posse of them put together!"

"He is n't!" Polly burst out. "How do you know?"

"So folks say. Believe it or not as you choose."

"I don't believe it! But what if he is! I don't care! Probably people are saying that I am a fool not to throw him over."

"Not exactly that. Most of them think you have done it — just as I did. You certainly ought to. I suppose I should be ashamed of myself, talking this way; but I'm not. I used to think

David Collins was a pretty fair sort; but the way he has tormented you is enough — I can't help hoping he'll get his pay for it all, and I don't doubt he will."

Polly listened with mingled anger and sorrow, added to the wonder that she did not speak out in David's defense. Was it true that David was — doing that? Was he? It was not like him — and yet —

. . . . . .

Suddenly Polly came to herself with a start. What had John been saying? She had not heard. She had been up in the Maine woods with David.

"If you can give me one little hope," he went on, "I will try to wait patiently until this affair with David is settled. If I have your permission to keep on loving you — as I must always love you whether you will or not — I can go away happier. Polly, may I carry that bit of hope with me?"

"Oh, no, no, John, you must not!" she cried hurriedly. "I shall never — marry! That I have decided. I expect to be a nurse. I enjoy taking care of people, especially children, and I think father and mother will like me to do that. The children here are so interesting. They make me forget — " Her voice became inaudible.

"It will take more than interesting children to make me forget!" exclaimed the young man. Then he — the self-contained John Eustis — did

a surprising thing. He caught Polly's hand and pressed it impetuously to his lips.

In vain she tried to pull away. Gripping the little hand with a force that hurt, he left fierce, passionate kisses upon fingers and palm.

When they drove into Overlook they were conversing in a friendly way, but with more than a touch of constraint, and the good-byes were as conventional as they were brief.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNINVITED GUEST AND A MYSTERY

PATRICIA had come up to Overlook, had stayed a week, and had gone back to Fair Harbor, leaving manifold regrets that the visit could not have been longer. Patricia Illingworth in her happiest mood always made friends wherever she went, and this time Patricia was in her very happiest mood.

Polly had listened to the story of the lovers' "misunderstanding," listened with a feeling of guilt and shame at memory of her attempt to bridge over the quarrel that was not and of which Patricia was never to hear. That secret belonged alone to John Eustis and herself. If Polly's face showed anything of the disquiet in her heart, Patricia did not perceive it, her eyes for the time being undiscerning beyond a certain focus. On the third finger of her left hand she wore a modest diamond, one which befitted the station of a young man who was not far above the lower rounds of the ladder of success. But, small as it was, it was cherished as a girl should cherish her betrothal ring regardless of its size.

To the little patients on Overlook Mountain

Patricia seemed a fairy godmother, indeed, for she had left with them an unbelievable number of pretty presents, enough to go quite around more than once.

Even Benedicta had been won over — perhaps for the first time in her life — to a girl of fashion.

"I d'n' know 's she's any better 'n other folks," Benedicta told Polly after Patricia was gone; "but when she comes round inside one o' them bewilderin' dresses, an' smiles to you so sweet an' convincin', you're ready to give her everything to make her do it again. It's funny, but she gits me every time."

To the next visitor, however, Benedicta showed a silent scorn that was held back from being a veritable broadside of personal opinions only by the fact that she was a guest of Polly's.

One afternoon Annette had laboriously climbed the stairs that led from the ward to the room occupied by Polly and Lilith, to say:—

"Miss Dudley, there's a lady that wants to see you."

"Who is she?"

"I don't know her," declared the child.

"Is she walking?" inquired Lilith.

"No'm — I mean, Miss Brooks — she's standin' up, 'thout she's sed down."

Annette walked across to the window and craned her neck to try to see over the edge of the veranda roof.

"No, no," laughed Lilith; "I meant, did she come in a car?"

"No, Miss Brooks, she did n't; she just came — like Miss Blackstone and Miss Foster and Mrs. Shaw and — "

"Never mind, dear," interrupted Polly, cutting short Annette's list of the neighbors. "I will see what she wants."

She ran down lightly. It was probably an agent — their calls were not infrequent.

Beyond the doorway a girl with her back to the entrance was taken up with the distant view. Polly caught her breath — and then stepped out to greet her visitor.

"How do you do, Marietta? This is a surprise, indeed!"

Miss Converse smiled complacently. "I expected to cause some astonishment up here this morning; but I could n't conveniently send word ahead."

"You did n't walk up?"

"Walk? Is that feat one of the Overlook stunts? If it is I must accomplish it before I leave. I have n't done so rash a thing yet. A friend happened to be motoring down, and he was kind enough to bring me up to Sally's. I intended to stay there a few days before throwing myself on your hospitality; but the Robinsons are full to overflowing — one of the young men occupied a couch hammock last night. Not that I mind

sleeping in the open, I enjoy it myself; but Sally vetoed that at once, so here I am, a beggar at your door! Later she says she will be delighted to have me with them. So I shall only be changing the time of my visit to you."

Of course, Polly voiced as warm a welcome as she could compass at the moment, and it evidently satisfied Marietta; to the hostess herself it sounded stiff and cold.

The visitor talked incessantly, so that Polly's silence was able to pass unnoticed. She felt that Marietta had an object in coming; but it was long before she decided what that object could be. Had it anything to do with David? His name was not mentioned at first. Polly hesitated to speak it, and it was finally Marietta who forestalled her.

"You ought to see how changed David is," she said to Polly. "You'd hardly know him."

"Has he grown so stout?" inquired Lilith innocently.

This sent Marietta off in a convulsion of laughter. "Oh, if that is n't the very funniest thing!" she exclaimed at the end of her fit of mirth. "I must repeat that to David. How he will enjoy it!"

Lilith sat silent with reddening face. Polly's eyes showed warning glints of displeasure. Finally Miss Converse was ready to explain.

"Oh, I did not mean that at all!" she smiled, halting a moment as if in satisfied recollections. "Of course, you live so very quietly here, it

is n't strange that you did n't understand." She glanced at Lilith. "David is a changed man. Why, he is the very life of the camp! He leads everything that's going, and there's something on all the time. We almost never get a day of rest. I'm actually glad to be where I can breathe quietly. Up there in the daytime it is rowing or bathing or hiking or tennis or golf or motor picnic, and there's a party somewhere nearly every night. David is in the heart of it all, and the girls just adore him! He is really adorable! You'd never know him, never, for the dignified, reticent David Collins of Fair Harbor."

A little amused smile on Polly's face made Lilith wonder; but neither of them said much. Miss Converse did not need assistance. She talked until Lilith actually felt sleepy and finally excused herself on plea of some urgent duty. Polly longed to follow; but her guest gave her no chance for withdrawal, and it was late before she could obtain a release.

On the morning after Marietta's arrival as Polly was passing through the kitchen, Benedicta called her aside and with a show of secrecy closed the door which opened on the dining-room porch.

"Miss Polly" — she lowered her tone — "there ain't anything much for dinner! Somebody's got to go down to Overlook, an' it better be me."

"Where's Grocer Jack?"

"More 'n I know. I told him we should n't want

anything Monday and he need n't stop. I saw Mis' Seldon last night and she said he was 'most sick when he was at her house; so I take it he ain't comin'. It's too late for him now. I've got to have some sugar for certain to-day — there's cookies an' shortcake an' lots of things wantin' sugar. An' steak I must get — and eggs if Young Ben has got any. We ate up the last scrap of meat for breakfast — my! how that piece of vainglory does eat!"

"Miss Converse?"

"Huh! — yere. I'd like to shut her up in the closet till she learned how to behave."

"What's the matter with her?" smiled Polly.

Benedicta shrugged her shoulders with another "Huh!" — "I'm goin' now," she said.

It was two o'clock when she returned. The children had had a luncheon, and were taking their afternoon rest. She drove directly to the garage, without a glance toward the veranda where Polly and the White Nurse were sitting.

Polly met her at the kitchen door with proffers of assistance.

"No, you go 'long to your comp'ny," returned the housekeeper. "I don't need any help."

Polly turned away, but was arrested by a little exclamation from Benedicta who was opening her parcels.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," was the short answer.

"Better let me put the things in the pantry while you start dinner," urged Polly. "I can fill the sugar bowls, too — where is the sugar?" She took up a paper bag, but it held rye flour.

"You just tend to your business," spoke up Benedicta, "and let mine alone. Thank you, but I don't wa— need you round."

Polly went at once. What could be the matter with Benedicta!

The dessert was not what Polly had looked for, only a shortcake made with canned peaches. What the sugar had been especially wanted for was the fresh fruit set aside for the shortcake.

"You don't get many berries up here, do you?" observed Marietta.

"Yes, indeed," answered Lilith, "we have loads of them."

"Oh!" was the reply, in a tone that seemed to add, "Where are they, pray?"

Polly ventured again into Benedicta's domain. "If you are going to make cookies for tea, as you spoke of," she said, "suppose you have cocoanut cookies. Marietta has heard of yours, and says she enjoys cocoanut very much."

"I ain't goin' to make cookies this afternoon."

Polly greeted Benedicta's glance with a little puzzled smile.

"I s'pose I may as well tell you an' done with it," the housekeeper began, her face flooded with crimson. "I clean forgot the sugar."

"Oh," said Polly regretfully, "that's too bad! Perhaps I might drive down pretty soon, I don't know — "

"I do' want yer to," Benedicta answered decisively. "I'll borrow some at Young Ben's."

Polly went away thinking hard. What had occurred to make Benedicta forget one of the most important purchases — Benedicta who rarely forgot anything? And was it only pride that caused her to try to hide it? But for Marietta Polly would have dwelt longer upon the housekeeper's singular behavior. The visitor gave her hostess plenty of food for thought, and that not of the pleasantest kind.

"I never would have believed that you could be satisfied with this dead existence," Marietta remarked with emphasis, as the girls sat together on the bank of the brook that ran back of the house.

"Dead!" Polly repeated, a tiny scowl fretting her smooth forehead. "Anything but that, I should call it."

"Well, not much like what you have been accustomed to. I should die to be shut out from everything, the way you are up here."

Polly's cheeks grew red, and a queer little smile came and went.

"I think it is a beautiful thing to help little children to be better and happier; don't you?"

Marietta gave a short laugh, and lifted her eyebrows. "Oh, of course, if you put it that way.

I'd rather be excused — at my age. It is all right enough for those who are on the shelf."

Polly could not trust an answer. The red on her cheeks deepened, and if Marietta had seen her eyes at that moment she would have discovered an ominous flash.

Marietta, however, was flinging pebbles in the brook and was watching the rings they made.

How long the uninvited guest would have remained at Sunrise Chalet if Sally Robinson had not come over with the announcement that her room was vacant and waiting for her is uncertain. As it was, she went home with Sally, not at all to Polly's displeasure. She had felt that she could not bear the strain of being constantly on the watch for what Marietta would say next about David. It had been an unpleasant experience from first to last, and she wondered over and over what had been the girl's object in coming.

Benedicta was plainly glad that the visitor was gone; but in these days she said little about anything, her forbidding silence being remarked upon by everybody, from the White Nurse down to Little Duke.

CHAPTER XX

THE TELEGRAM

GROCER JACK was in the kitchen, and Benedicta called, "Miss Polly!"

The man greeted her with the smile that he usually wore.

"Good-morning," he said. "You're goin' to have comp'ny!"

"Am I?" she asked in surprise. "One visitor has just left. Who else is coming?"

"Wal," replied the grocer, "all I know is what Richmond told me, jus' 's I was startin' out."

"Richmond?" repeated Polly questioningly.

"Yere, 'xpress agent, ticket agent, freight agent, telegraph operator — all hands in one. He said he had a telegraph for you, an' you was goin' to have comp'ny, he guessed, comin' on the quarter-of-twelve train this noon."

"But why did n't he send me the telegram?" Polly's eyes were wide with amazement.

Grocer Jack puckered up his mouth and raised his eyebrows.

"I guess ther' was n't anybody lyin' round handy 't could come. He said I could tell ye the drift of it."

"Did you see it?" questioned Polly.

"Only as he had it in his hand. I — "

"Why did n't he send it up by you?" she broke in.

"I dunno. Guess likely he did n't think's he could. I did n't."

Dismay sat on Polly's face.

"And don't you know whom it was from?"

"I was tryin' to think. I can't seem to remember. It was a funny name — I've heard it before somewhere."

"It was n't from my father, was it?" excitement in her voice.

"Le' 's see, your name 's — "

"Dudley. My father is Robert Dudley."

"No, 't wa'n't that," was the slow answer.

"Sardis Merrifield?"

"That's the ticket! I know now where I'd heard it! I remembered that 'Church in Sardis,' there in Revelations, you know. Yere, he's the one. He's comin' this noon. Whatever made anybody name a boy Sardis! 'Xpectin' of him, was you?"

Polly nodded absently. She was looking at the clock and making a quick calculation. Was there time to get down to Overlook before that 11.45 train? She decided she could do it.

Running upstairs, she begged Lilith to get Dolly and herself ready for the ride, while she slipped into a fresh frock and then out to the garage.

She stood gazing at the car in a bewildered way, when Benedicta rushed up with a little wailing cry.

Polly turned, and the woman began to weep into her hands.

"What in the world! — First the car and now you! Am I dreaming or not?"

"Oh, Miss Polly! Miss Polly! I wish it was a dream! Sinners and snobs, I wish it was!"

"What is the matter, Benedicta? What are you crying for?"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish I had n't ever touched your chariot at all!"

"Where is my car?" asked Polly quietly.

"Oh, Miss Polly! — it's — down in Overlook!"

"Did you have an accident? What is the trouble? Stop crying, and tell me about it!"

"I will, Miss Polly — oh, to think I should hurt your beautiful car!" And again Benedicta wept.

"But what did you do to it?"

"I — I can't bear to say it!"

"I will wait till you can. We must get to Overlook in time to meet that train, and I'm going to drive this car, if it's drivable, no matter whose it is." Polly proceeded to test the steering-gear and the brakes, without a look towards the sobbing Benedicta.

"If that old Sardis had only waited till tomorrow or next day," began the weeping woman, "then you need n't have known anything about it — oh, dear! You'll never trust me again, Miss Polly, and — and — oh, I did n't mean to do it!"

Polly threw up her head and laughed, a genuine,

exhilarating little laugh, which brought Benedicta's hands down from her face, showing her eyes big and red and staring.

"I had n't the least idea, Benedicta, that you smashed my car on purpose." She laughed again.

"Teeters and tongs!" ejaculated the housekeeper, "if you ain't the limit!"

"I am afraid my patience will be at the 'limit' if Lilith and Dolly don't come pretty quick."

"Oh, I don't want 'em to, till I've told you how it happened!"

"Hurry up, then!"

"I will, I will!" And Benedicta dropped into the doorway at Polly's feet. "I did n't smash it, Miss Polly, as you said — that is, I only smashed up a headlight and one wheel. You see, I went down the hill careful, just as you told me to, and was goin' along Fountain Street pretty good, when who should I spy comin' towards me, in an auto, but my Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé! I could n't believe my eyes at first, and I said to myself, 'It ain't them!' — 'It is, too!' — 'It ain't!' — 'It is!' — just like that. Then, when I see they were real flesh and blood, if I did n't steer for 'em — not thinkin', I s'pose, but that I was drivin' a horse an' buggy — and before they could get out o' my way bang — ! I was right into 'em! The queer part is, I did n't hurt them a mite, or their car, either. But what did make me do such a fool thing — that's what I'd like to know!"

"You are not the first one, Benedicta, that has run into another car."

"Don' know's I want to be a fool 'cause somebody else is! Wal, Mr. Aimé towed my — your car to the garage that Dick Ringo keeps — I've known Dick ever since he was an infant, and he let me have this car. He said it was a dandy, and you'd never know the difference. But I told him, 'Don't you b'lieve that nonsense, Dick Ringo!' — 'Know the difference!' I saw what would happen soon's you set your eyes on it, an' I was scared out o' my senses. Dick said they'd fix up yours good as new; so I kep' comfortin' myself all the way home by sayin' it might ha' been worse. But I could n't bear to have you know it — no, I could n't. An', Miss Polly, what do you think! My Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé want me to come live with them, same as I did before. But I said, 'No, sir! I'm goin' to stay with Miss Polly to the last minute she's here, an' if she comes up to Overlook Mountain next year and the next and the next, I'm with her through the very last next.' — My, there's Miss Brooks luggin' that child!" And Benedicta ran across the lawn to take Dolly from the arms of Lilith.

The miles to the railway station were covered in good time, and the borrowed car was waiting for Sardis Merrifield when the first whistle of the 11.45 train rang down the narrow valley of Overlook.

As the big locomotive appeared round the curve, Dolly was quiet with suppressed excitement. Sardis was coming! Once more she would hear his loving voice! Every pulse in her frail little body thrilled with the thought of it. As the cars glided by, she peered eagerly from the automobile in the hope of seeing his familiar face at one of the windows. But she could recognize no one. With nerves at high tension, she watched the people as they filed out of the train. The little station-house hid the rear car, and her eyes wandered back and forth.

"I'll go round in front," said Polly, and her lithe figure disappeared on the other side of the building.

She did not come back.

Dolly sat alert and breathless, a sudden terror growing in her heart lest her watching were all in vain.

The train moved away, and still Polly was not in sight.

"I'm afraid — " began Dolly softly.

Then Polly appeared — alone!

"He has n't come!" the watchers heard her say. "Dear little girl, don't feel bad!" For the child's eyes were threatening an overflow. "Probably he missed his train. All we have to do is to wait for the next."

The tone was heartening, and Dolly began to smile.

"I was afraid he would n't come at all," she confessed.

"He will come," Polly assured her confidently.

"How soon is the next train?" questioned Lilith.

"In about an hour and a half. We'll go uptown and get some ice-cream."

At this delightful suggestion Dolly brightened. Of course, Sardis would come on the next train. How foolish she had been to lose hope!

Before they left the station, Polly called at the telegraph office and obtained her message, leaving instructions to have any possible future telegrams delivered to her at once. The slip of yellow paper was fascinating to Dolly, since it seemed to bring her brother nearer.

Expect me on 11.45 train to-morrow.

SARDIS MERRIFIELD

That was all it said. The date was of the previous day.

The cream was all that the little girl's fancy had pictured it, and the pineapple ice that Polly added made it quite the finest that she had ever tasted. If Sardis had been sitting at her side her joy would have been perfect. Still, her anticipation was there to make up any lack, and she was very happy.

The 1.06 train thundered in and out of Overlook valley; the borrowed car with its anxious passengers waited back of the station-house; but Sardis Merrifield did not appear.

Polly was philosophical.

"There's nothing to do," she said, "but to wait."

"Till when?" asked Lilith.

Polly studied her time-table placidly.

"The next, and last, train is due at 5.30."

"Oh!" was the dismayed exclamation from Lilith and Dolly.

Polly laughed.

"Never mind," she said; "we'll go over to the inn and have dinner — I think it is n't too late," as she consulted her watch. "And then — " She halted, thinking. "Oh, I know! We'll drive down to Leslieboro and go to the movies!"

"Oh, my!" cried Dolly, her eyes big with surprise.

"How will that do?" Polly smiled.

"Splendid!" returned the child.

"Jolly," said Lilith. "There's a good picture on this week. I remember reading of it in the *Gazette*."

In the proposed way the afternoon passed pleasantly, and the party was back at the Overlook station when the last train rolled in. Yet once more they were disappointed. Only six passengers alighted, three women, a small boy, and two middle-aged men. Sardis Merrifield was missing.

Polly inquired again at the telegraph office. There was no message; but the man of various

positions promised to send her whatever should come.

The drive up the mountain was for the most part silent. Dolly was too full of grief to talk, and after a while she went to sleep on Lilith's arm. It had been a hard day for the little girl.

CHAPTER XXI

"TEN LITTLE GIRLS" AND SARDIS MERRIFIELD

POLLY and Lilith did not go to Overlook the next morning. What was the use, Polly said. The expected guest might have been so delayed that he could not come for several days. He would doubtless telegraph. And Lilith agreed with her. Dolly Merrifield said nothing; she only smiled, and sighed a sorry little sigh that Polly did not hear, so very soft it was. Nevertheless, the "hospital force," as Lilith called the grown-up members of the family, did not wander far from the house.

"We must hang around and watch for a telegram," laughed Polly.

But no word came — and no Sardis, either. The waiting grew tedious.

"It is getting on that child's nerves," fretted the White Nurse. "She'll make herself sick with worrying."

Benedicta ran to the window every time she caught the whir of a motor car, no matter what she was doing.

"He must be a very vacillating gentleman," she commented, "not to do one thing or the other — I'd do something, if I were him!"

"I think he does one thing pretty thoroughly,"

returned Dr. Abbe, coming up on the kitchen piazza in time for the housekeeper's remark. "He certainly stays away and keeps us guessing."

"He keeps me guessin' what I'll get to eat," sniffed Benedicta. "I make something 'specially good, an' then we eat every scrap, and that's the way it keeps goin'. If he don't arrive pretty soon, I shan't care if he does n't have any eats at all."

The Doctor passed on with a generous tribute to her cooking, and the advice not to expect "the minister" until he came.

Polly heard, smiled, and went on thinking of Dolly. Something must be done to interest the sorrowing little girl.

"After dinner we'll go up in the woods," Polly said, "and I'll tell stories, and then we'll have supper up there."

All the little folks were smiling eagerly before Polly had finished planning aloud. Even Dolly Merrifield was mildly excited.

So up in the woods they went. Those that could not walk rode in wheel-chairs or in somebody's arms, and when every one was comfortable the story-telling began.

They had heard about "How the Swallows Went to Bed," "The Golden Horse" who told which way the wind blew and who after much trouble came at last to his own, and "Mother Gray-gobble's Children" whose lives were saved by

their parent's wit and wisdom, when Benedicta appeared with her crocheting.

"Don't stop for me," she told Polly. "It was too lonesome with you all up here. I locked up, 'cause I knew you'd ask me."

"You don't think there's any danger in leaving the house quite alone, do you?" inquired the White Nurse anxiously.

Benedicta laughed. "It's safe as Sunday," she answered. "I've set a chair right in front of the front door, and anybody that knows me knows that means nobody's home."

"Oh, but, Benedicta," the White Nurse protested, "if a tramp should come along, it would tell him there is n't a soul in the house, and he'd steal everything he could lay hold of!"

"Tramp!" scorned the housekeeper. "Never but a solitary one ever did meander up here, an' he'd lost his way and was on the road back when Young Ben met him."

"I think there is not the slightest danger," Polly reassured those that had begun to look worried.

"Do tell another story!" pleaded Jozy.

"About the twin that did n't know himself!" suggested Grissel.

"Oh, no!" cried Timmy; "let's have that one about the boy who killed the big wolf and got the money to go to school with."

"No, don't!" shivered Muriel. "Please tell about the Ten Little Girls and Mr. Cross."

"We will put it to vote," said Polly. "Those in favor of the Ten Little Girls, say 'I.'"

"That sounds like more than ten little girls," she smiled, clapping her hands to her ears, as the chorus of shrill voices rang through the woods.

All but two or three settled themselves with content, as the story-teller started in the good old-fashioned way.

"Once upon a time ten little girls were on their way home from school. There were Eunice and Lucy and Jane and Susan and Nancy and Martha and Ruth, besides the three Marys — Mary Fox, Mary Lyon, and Mary Lamb.

"Mary Fox was talking.

"'Let's go over in the pasture and see those dear little lambs,' she said.

"'Oh, I'm afraid of the sheep!' gasped Susan.

"'They won't hurt you,' Ruth assured her. 'Come!'

"The three Marys were already over the fence. The rest followed, timid Susan at the end of the line.

"For an instant the sheep stared at their visitors; then the leader turned suddenly and vaulted a low stone wall into another field, and the rest dashed after him. It was over in a minute, and the sheep pasture was left in sole possession of the ten little girls.

"They looked at one another with frightened eyes.

"'I wish we had n't come,' mourned Mary Lamb, and the nine others said that they wished they had not come, too.

"'What will Mr. Cross say!' cried Jane. 'Jim Tucker says he is just like his name — Oh, dear! oh, dear!'

"'Oh, dear! oh, dear!' echoed the nine others.

"'Maybe the sheep will run away and never come back,' said Nancy.

"'Maybe!' agreed the rest.

"'I think we ought to go and tell Mr. Cross,' ventured Mary Lamb.

"'Oh, I don't dare!' Mary Lyon said.

"'I don't dare, either,' said Mary Fox.

"And the seven others said that they did not dare, too.

"'I dare,' said Mary Lamb. 'Anyway, if I don't dare, I'll go if you'll all go with me.'

"The nine agreed to go; so they climbed back over the fence and they turned down the road that led to Mr. Cross's home.

"Mr. Cross was sitting on the back piazza and when he saw the ten little girls coming round the corner of the house a big smile spread over his face.

"'Well, well, well!' he said. 'Have you all come to call on me? Let's see — ten of you! Well, well, I'll have to get some chairs, won't I?'

"Mary Lamb, with a very scared face, said that they could not stay to sit down, and then she told about the sheep and how they had run away.

"The smile on Mr. Cross's face had been growing bigger and bigger, until now it broke into a funny, chuckling laugh that made Mr. Cross shake all over.

"'Well, well!' he ejaculated. 'So the whole flock jumped over the wall, did they? Well, I can't blame 'em much. Why, when I was a boy, if I had seen ten little girls coming to get acquainted with me, I'd have jumped over a stone wall myself. Ho, ho, ho!' And Mr. Cross laughed and laughed, until the ten little girls would have laughed, too, only they could not quite, they were so scared.

"'We're so sorry!' said Mary Lamb.

"'Yes, we're so sorry!' said the nine others.

"'It was all my fault,' confessed Mary Fox bravely. 'And, oh! do you suppose they are lost forever 'n' ever?'

"'You come and see,' chuckled Mr. Cross. Then he took his hat down from a peg, and he and the ten little girls went back to the pasture.

"Over the fence they scrambled, and Mr. Cross took a little whistle from his pocket and blew it softly.

"In a minute the head of a big sheep appeared, and before the ten little girls had time to think the whole flock were back in their own pasture and were coming straight for Mr. Cross.

"'Oh!' cried Susan.

"'Oh! Oh!' cried the nine others.

"'Well, well, well!' said Mr. Cross. 'Don't

mean to say you're afraid? Well, they'll be the 'fraidest — see!'

"Even then the sheep had stopped, hardly knowing whether to come or to turn back.

"'Need n't be a mite afraid,' Mr. Cross said to the ten little girls huddled close behind him, and then again softly he blew his whistle.

"At that the sheep came forward, and the ten little girls were half frightened and half delighted to see how tame they were and how they fairly tumbled over one another to poke their noses into Mr. Cross's pockets, to get the salt which was there.

"'Is n't he nice!' exclaimed Mary Lamb, after the ten little girls had bidden Mr. Cross a laughing good-bye.

"'Is n't he!' echoed the nine.

"'I think Jim Tucker was the cross one,' said Mary Fox.

"'Anyway, Mr. Cross is n't cross!' declared Mary Lyon.

"And that made the ten little girls laugh all the way home."

Benedicta started it. She dropped her crocheting in her lap and clapped her hands with a will.

At that, everybody else clapped — everybody but Polly, and the most venturesome little patient cried out, "Hurrah! hurrah!"

Of course, the rest followed, and among the cheers was plainly distinguishable a deeper voice

than Dr. Abbe's, a voice that seemed to come from the thicket back of where the story-teller was sitting.

Everybody looked in that direction — everybody but Polly. She could not turn quickly, with Little Duke within the circle of one arm and Dolly Merrifield in the other. But Dolly screwed her head around just as a young man stepped into view.

"Sardis!" she squealed; "oh, Sardis!"

Then Dolly was in her brother's arms, and quickly his hand and Polly Dudley's met in a cordial grasp, while the eyes of the others were bent on the man who had kept them waiting to welcome him for more than twenty-four hours.

The most of these decided that he was good to look at — tall and straight and muscular, with deep blue eyes like Dolly's, but with hair that was almost black.

"What made you wait till to-day?" piped up Dolly. "Why did n't you come yesterday? Did you hear the story about the ten little girls? Have you just come, or have you 'most just?"

"I shall have to confess to hearing nearly all of the 'Ten Little Girls,'" he answered, throwing an apologetic smile in Polly's direction. "I did n't want to interrupt the story. When I could find nobody at the house, voices led me this way."

"Don't you think the ten-little-girls story is just lovely?" Dolly continued.

"Very nice, indeed."

"And was n't it foolish for them to be afraid of the sheep?"

"It was quite natural," he replied. "I think I feel very much as they did."

"Afraid!" she cried. "Why, Sardis, there are n't any sheep here!"

Of course, then all the grown-ups laughed.

"There are a good many little girls," he smiled into Dolly's astonished eyes.

"I should n't think you'd be so afraid of little girls as you would of big girls," she returned.

At which they all laughed again.

"I don't think you're very much afraid," she decided. "You don't look a bit scared. But I want to know how you got up here," she went on. "Did you come in a car? I did n't hear any."

"There was none to hear. I came on my feet."

"Walked?" cried the child, aghast at the thought.

"It was a delightful little journey, up between the pines and the ferns."

"Is n't it beautiful!" responded Polly, glad of his appreciation.

"A wonderful road," he said. "I would not like to have missed it."

"But riding up with Miss Dudley is lovely," put in Dolly, "'cause then you can sit back and just enjoy it. Though I should think it would be nice to walk," she added wistfully.

A shadow of pain swept the young man's face; then he smiled brilliantly.

"What an astonishing gain you have made, little girl!" he said.

"Have n't I!" she beamed. "And my cheeks are red! — have you noticed?"

He nodded happily.

"You and I are under great obligations to Miss Dudley and her wise father."

Dolly wagged her head in no uncertain way, and then laid her cheek against his.

"Miss Dudley is the nicest one in all the world," she said impressively, "except you and Aunt Sophie."

The talk was growing too personal for Polly's comfort, so with a casual, "The others are waiting to meet you," she crossed over to Dr. Abbe and the rest.

The introductions being done with, the party proceeded back to the house, Sardis Merrifield carrying his sister and wheeling Grissel.

On the home veranda Dolly chattered happily.

"You have n't said yet why you did n't come yesterday," she reminded him playfully.

"You shall hear about it," he answered. "I had been to visit a sick man, and was on my way home — something more than two miles from the station. I had just looked at my watch and decided I had time enough and to spare to go to my boarding-place and get my bag before the train

would be in, when a little woman darted out of a house and called to me. Her baby had been taken sick and she did n't know what to do. Her husband was out of town for the day, and she did n't dare to leave the child to go for a doctor. She was frantic, and with good reason. The baby had had one convulsion and was on the verge of another. It happened that I knew something of what should be done; so I applied the usual remedies, and in a few minutes the little fellow seemed better. Then I went for the doctor, only a mile off, and fortunately found him home. His horse had gone lame, or he would have been away visiting patients. We went back together, and he said the child was doing all right then. The mother begged me so hard to stay with her that I had n't the heart to leave her alone. So, you see, my visit up here had to be postponed."

"And is the little baby all right now?" asked Dolly, who had become greatly interested in her brother's story.

"He appeared to be when I saw him this morning."

"Did you go 'way out there before you came up here?" she asked.

He nodded. "That was n't too much to do for a very nice little woman and a very nice little baby, was it?"

Dolly shook her head. "No. I'm glad you went, because now I know the baby 'll get well.

Sardis is always doing things like that," she added, directing her remark across to Polly.

"'Things like that' are the things that we all of us ought to do," returned Polly.

"I can't," said Dolly softly.

"That is n't your part,"—Polly took the small hand in hers.

"What is my part?" she asked thoughtfully.

"Just being sweet as a little flower," replied Polly, smiling down into the wistful face. "And that is exactly what you are," she added truthfully.

A look of pleased surprise came into the blue eyes.

"Do you really mean it, Miss Dudley?"

"Really and truly!"

"Then, please let me kiss you."

Polly bent her head, and Dolly put up her arms and drew her still closer.

"I'm glad you said that now," she whispered softly, "'cause I want Sardis to know you think it. You are so dear!"

Polly was strangely touched, and quick tears sprang to her eyes. She found herself wondering if Sardis Merrifield had heard the whispered words. As if it mattered whether he had or not!

After the children were asleep and Benedicta had said good-night, the others sat on the moonlit veranda, and merry talk had its way until late. Finally when the five stood together before separating for the night, the visitor said: —

"I want you all to know how grateful I am for your kindness to my sister. It is not only that her gain in health is far more than I thought it ever could be—you have put so much brightness into her life! It is something which I cannot frame in words, but I think you will understand."

As he and Dr. Abbe walked across the lawn to the Study, the White Nurse said:—

"What a man he is! And what a boy, too! I think I'd like to hear him preach."

"I know his sermon would be worth while," asserted Lilith.

Polly said nothing.

CHAPTER XXII

A LITTLE LAME DUCK

I WISH Sardis could go to that place where the lovely ducks are," said Dolly Merrifield the next morning.

"You'll have to tell him about it," advised Polly.

"That won't be seeing," sighed Dolly.

Polly's eyes widened with a sudden thought, then narrowed as a plan began to form.

"If your brother will stay over until to-morrow, we will drive up to Lairnie Lake and have our lunch there."

"To-day?" cried Dolly ecstatically.

Polly nodded.

"It is a small pleasure resort," she explained to the young man, "some forty-five miles to the north."

"Oh, Sardis!" exclaimed the little one, her blue eyes begging for the answer which he hesitated to give.

"I ought not," he began, and then smiled down to the small girl on his knee.

"Are the web-footed swimmers on Lairnie Lake very different from those elsewhere?"

"Oh, ever so different!" she laughed. "But I'm

not going to tell you one word more. He'll stay, Miss Dudley! I know by his eyes — they are full of nice twinkles."

It was decided that Polly and Lilith, Dolly and her brother, and Dr. Abbe should take a flying trip to the lake which a number of them had visited a week or two previous.

Dolly, in an ecstasy of joy, kept things lively until the start. After being dressed for the little journey she was put in her wheel-chair which stood near the edge of the piazza, and, bubbling over as she was with eager delight, she twisted this way and that until Polly was startled by one of her sudden turns.

"Oh, Dolly!" she cried, "do sit still! I thought you were going over!" She crossed the piazza and moved the chair back a bit.

"I shall not fall," laughed the child happily.

"Wis' she would!" piped up a little voice three chairs away, "wis' she would, and be all deaded!"

"Why, Marmaduke Bill!" Polly's voice was shocked. "What a wicked wish!"

"Don't care!" retorted the little boy. "Wis' she would!"

Polly walked over to Little Duke and turned his chair so that it faced the house.

"I am sorry that you have such naughty thoughts," she said in a soft voice. And she left him without the smile or the loving pat with which she was used to delight his heart.

"My don't care! My don't care!" he pouted.

The other children looked on with frightened, wondering eyes. It was seldom that Polly dealt out punishment even in this mild fashion.

Presently, after she had gone upstairs, Sardis Merrifield came across from the Study, and taking a book from his pocket began to read.

Little Duke had been humming to himself in a loud, disagreeable way, and now, he opened his mouth and uttered a series of unintelligible sounds.

The young man looked over to the chair with its face to the wall.

"Not quite so much noise, please!" His voice was kind.

The clamor went on.

"Little boy, did you hear what I said?"

"Yep!" And the shouts continued.

The children sat breathless, open-mouthed and wide-eyed.

"Will you stop that screaming?" the man said quietly.

"Did Mi' Duddy say My must stop?" piped the little offender.

"No, but I say so," was the firm answer.

"Does My have to mind you, too?"

"Surely you do."

Dolly snickered noiselessly into her hand; but not a sound came from Little Duke.

Upstairs Polly had heard and had hastened her dressing, standing poised at the head of the stairs

when the last of the conversation floated up to her. She waited a moment. The veranda was hushed, and with a smile she returned to her room. She was not needed to keep the peace as long as Sardis Merrifield was there. The White Nurse and Lilith had had more than one battle with strong-willed Little Duke when it had been needful to summon Polly before the lovable little rogue could be subdued.

When the party assembled on the veranda Polly noticed that the boy's chair had been wheeled about, and as she glanced that way he spoke.

"Mi' Duddy, My thought you could take a joke."

"So I can, Little Duke. Good-bye and a happy day to you!"

He grinned gleefully, and she explained to Sardis Merrifield as they drove away, "That is his apology. He never fails to have it ready on time."

Not far from noon they arrived at the pleasure ground.

"Oh, dear!" cried the little girl, "the ducks are not any of them here!"

"They are up at the other end of the lake." Polly pointed across the water.

"But that is n't here," mourned the child.

"If they won't come to us, we shall have to go to them," her brother replied.

"They will be here soon enough," laughed Lilith.

Yet Dolly saw no hope; her longing eyes were fastened upon those far-away birds.

As time was precious and the long ride had made them hungry, Polly proposed luncheon at once, and selecting a pleasant spot they arranged seats and began to take out sandwiches. Dolly was so interested in the preparations that for the moment ducks were forgotten.

"Look!" bade Sardis. "See that big V!"

"Oh!" exulted Dolly, "it's a duck — and he's coming this way!" She watched the rippling V, and then said softly, as if half afraid to utter so beautiful a thought, "Do you s'pose he saw me and — knows me?"

"He saw you, no doubt; but recognition would hardly be possible at that distance, would it?"

Dolly sighed a little. "No, of course, he could n't," she answered. Then she chuckled joyously. "He's steering straight for me!"

It did seem so, and climbing up the grassy bank, the duck waddled directly to the little girl's side.

"Oh, you dear ducky-darling!" she exclaimed. "And you're the little lame one I fed the other day, are n't you? See, Sardis! he's lame just a wee bit when he walks."

"Quack! quack!" said the duck.

Dolly gave up the greater part of her sandwich, for the bird had a holiday appetite, and as soon as one morsel was down he quacked for more.

"Is n't his neck a lovely green!" the child cried. "And is n't he tame and beautiful!"

Sardis and the others admired and marveled to Dolly's content. And then, she suddenly gave a shout of joy.

"Oh, the rest are coming! Look at the V's! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight! Eight ducks more! And there is the great goose!" as a big bird swam out to join his comrades.

They were all counting on their noon luncheon.

"It is well we brought a good supply," laughed Lilith.

"We'll need it — look!" Dr. Abbe pointed his thumb backward.

"O-h!" screamed Dolly, "the dear little doves!"

A small flock of pigeons had alighted near.

They were tamer than the ducks. They fluttered about the child. One bird perched on her shoulder, another on her knee; the most venturesome flew to her wrist and reached for a bit of the bread in her hand. Dolly sat breathless, her little face radiant.

"I wish I had my camera," whispered Lilith.

Dolly suddenly turned towards her brother — whir-r-r-r! The child stared in wonderment.

"What made them fly away?" she asked.

"Which do you like best," questioned Lilith, "pigeons or ducks?"

"My little lame duck!" answered Dolly promptly, bestowing upon the bird a generous bit.

"Oh, the naughty thing!" she cried, as another duck caught up the dainty and then pecked and chased away the afflicted one. But Dolly's pet returned, and with the aid of Sardis the child gave it a good meal.

The half-circle of quacking beggars became vociferous, and Dolly fed them until her sandwiches must needs be often replaced, and the giver herself would have been in danger of going hungry if some one had not given out food with a prodigal hand.

Finally the luncheon was over, and the little girl — with a flourish of her small hands — told the birds that they could have no more. Promptly the ducks started off. Only the little lame one seemed reluctant to leave.

"He loves me — that's why," announced Dolly. "All the rest care for is something to eat."

The child's eyes followed the birds as they swam out from shore. Then she gave a little scream.

"Oh, he's drowning! he's drowning!" she cried, as a big duck appeared to be standing on his head in the water.

"Watch!" was all Sardis said.

"Oh, my! he's eating!" gasped Dolly. "He's catching bugs! How funny!"

They were all at it, excepting the lame duck that had squatted at the child's feet for a nap, and Sardis carried his sister nearer the shore where she

watched the birds delightedly, stopping now and then to give her pet a tiny pat, for he had promptly followed her.

Sardis had a moment's talk with Polly and then disappeared. He was away so long that Dolly made inquiries. Nobody seemed to know anything of him, unless it were Polly, and her answers to the child's questions were unsatisfactory. Then, suddenly, she was gone, too.

"Sardis came over the knoll and beckoned to Miss Dudley," explained Lilith, "and they went off together towards the street. That's all I know about it."

"I don't care, if he's with Miss Dudley," returned Dolly. "I was afraid he was lost."

Which made Dr. Abbe laugh so heartily that the little girl wondered what he had seen that was funny.

After a while the runaways returned, and then it was time to start for home. Before that, however, Polly took Lilith and Dolly for a short drive around the beautiful Loch Lairnie, which Dolly enjoyed talkatively every moment of the way. Only she did want Sardis to see it, and she could not understand why he did n't come, when there was plenty of room.

It had grown cool, so for the home drive Dolly rode in her brother's arms on the front seat. Presently she went to sleep and awoke saying that she had been dreaming about her little lame duck, and that he quacked her wide awake.

"There! I never bade him good-bye!" she lamented. "Why did n't I think of it! I wonder you did n't remind me, Sardis; you always think of everything."

Sardis laughed, and then Polly laughed, too. What was funny about that?

Next morning Dolly's brother took her in his arms and strode up to the little brook at the edge of the woods. For an instant the child stared in silence. Then her amazement broke into words.

"Why-ee!" she gasped; "it looks like my little lame duck! But how did he get here? Did he follow me?"

"Not quite," laughed her brother. "He came with you, he and his comrade."

"In the car?"

Sardis nodded.

"O-h!" cried Dolly comprehendingly; "that's why you and Miss Dudley laughed! That's why everybody laughed! And I did hear them quack, did n't I?"

"Probably, for the rest of us did."

"I might have known there was something, for you always love to surprise me — I love it, too," she chuckled, nestling her cheek to his.

"And are they going to stay and live right here?" she questioned later.

"Yes, they are yours. Miss Dudley thought the brook would answer very well for their swimming-place."

"It's lovely — you don't s'pose they'll be homesick?"

"Not a bit."

"Oh, I wish I had something to feed them with!"

A little basket of crumbs pushed its way into Dolly's hands.

"Why, Miss Dudley, I did n't know you were here!"

"I came just in time to hear your wish. I thought you'd be wanting to feed them about now."

"You guessed right. Is n't Sardis the best Sardis in the world to give them to me?"

"That is n't much of a compliment, Lady Merrifield," laughed her brother. "There are not many Sardises for me to compete with."

For an instant the child looked blank. Then she brightened. "Anyway, you're the best *brother* in the world!" she exclaimed. "You can't say anything against that!"

"I could say a good deal against it," smiling across to Polly; "but I won't, for" — his face suddenly sobered — "I am mighty glad you think so, Dorothy."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE "GARDEN OF EDEN"

AFTER Sardis Merrifield's visit Polly plunged into action with an energy that called out comment from her associates. She took the children on long drives until they had jaunted through nearly every town within fifty miles. In company with those small people that could walk she explored the near-by woods and fields and came home loaded with all manner of trophies. With help from Dr. Abbe she fashioned flower baskets and boxes in various shapes and sizes and filled them with her wild treasures in their native soil. She designed rustic seats under the trees, a wonderful sun arbor adjoining the side veranda, and she superintended the carpenters while they carried out her plans.

"What in the world ails you?" queried Lilith. "If I did n't know you so well, I should say you were trying to work off something unpleasant."

Polly laughed a queer little laugh, so queer that Lilith glanced across the room — and then quickly turned back. Polly, brushing some litter from the floor, was blushing furiously into the dustpan. Lilith's mind ran rapidly over the happenings of the past few days — and then she, too, began to blush. But she did not see herself and so went on

with her thoughts. Polly and Dr. Abbe had been thrown together a good deal of late — could there be anything —?

The White Nurse was calling her name, and she ran to answer.

That afternoon Lilith came upon Polly in the kitchen with Benedicta, learning to make the small cocoanut cakes which were Dr. Abbe's especial delight. Then Lilith thought more thoughts, and without any sensible reason went sadly the rest of the day.

The children had been begging for a picnic, so Lilith and the White Nurse took them down the mountain to a place which Dolly Merrifield had named the "Garden of Eden." It was a pretty spot, set with pines and birches, and fringed with bushes of various kinds, many of them now hung with berries. Pine-needles formed a thick, slippery carpet, and the sun filtered through the trees in an enchanting way.

A few hours later Dr. Abbe started for the picnic ground with two heavy baskets, Polly and Benedicta following with some frosted cakes, that the housekeeper would entrust to nobody else.

"Who is that girl talking with Lilith?" questioned Polly, halting at a point where one first caught a view of the delectable "garden."

Benedicta came up and narrowed her eyes to focus them on the stranger.

"Huh!" she ejaculated, "what's that kid doin'

round here! Say, I must — " Her voice trailed off inaudibly as, setting down her basket, she turned and hurried back on the road she had come.

"Why — !" began Polly; but the housekeeper was beyond a conversational tone, and Polly after a moment's wait went on down the road.

Arrived at her destination she crossed over to Lilith and the child whom she had seen.

The little girl was speaking, but paused with a touch of shyness when Polly came up.

"Miss Dudley will give you more information than I can," said Lilith. Then, turning to Polly, "This little girl has been telling me about her sister who has never walked."

Polly was interested at once and cordially held out her hand. "I should like to hear about her," she said.

"My Sunday-School class is up here on a picnic," the child explained, "over the knoll there; and I and another girl were just walking round, and we heard your children, so we came nearer to find out. I wanted to come to see you before, but grandfather would n't let me. I wondered if you were going to make them walk" — pointing to Grissel and Little Duke — "and I could n't help asking." The girl's face was eager and anxious.

"Let's sit down in the shade and talk it over." Polly put her arm around the slim shoulders and drew the child to the farther end of the "garden," quite out of hearing of the wheel-chairs.

"Has your little sister never walked at all?" was asked, as they sat down on a big log.

"Not a single step!" answered the child with emphasis; "and it does seem too bad, she is so beautiful. I never saw anybody so handsome in all my life, unless it was my mother. I can't remember much about mother; but grandfather says she was beautiful, like Rosalind. He says that grandmother used to be just as lovely as that, too. I think she's pretty now."

"Do you live with your grandfather?"

"Yes, ma'am, since father died — there's just Rosalind and me."

"I shall have to go to see this dear little Rosalind," smiled Polly, her arm tightening around the child.

"Oh, no!" was the unexpected reply, "grandfather would n't like it — you must n't! Maybe I can draw Rosalind up here in her cart. I'll try some day, if you'd like to see her."

"Surely I wish to see her; but I cannot understand what your grandfather has against me."

"Oh, nothing! Indeed, nothing at all! It is only — but I must n't talk about it! He does n't wish me to." The little girl shut her lips with a finality that made Polly wonder. She shifted from grandfather to grandchild.

"I suppose you don't know the cause of the trouble with your sister — " She paused.

"Oh, yes, ma'am! Grandmother says it was the

poor milk that we had when we lived in Stockville. Rosalind was just as healthy and strong as any baby until she began to drink that milk; but they did n't know it then, and so we kept on living there. Grandmother says I began to be sick, too, and mother. They found out afterwards that the peddler put formaldehyde in it, and that poisoned her. Finally Rosalind got so bad — and did n't walk at all when she ought to — that father woke up, grandmother says, and took her to the doctor; but nobody thought of the milk, and it was n't for a good while that they found out. Then it was too late. She had the rickets, you see, and after mother died father brought us up here. Then pretty soon he died, and we've been here ever since. Rosalind has had seven doctors, and grandmother and grandfather have got discouraged."

"I suppose it was malnutrition," thought Polly aloud.

"Yes," responded the child, "that's what it was — I remember, grandmother said so. Do you suppose you could cure her?" She went on, her eyes fixed on Polly's face, hungry for a bit of hope.

"I can do nothing, dear; my father has done wonderful things; but I don't know about this. He is coming up here soon, and if your grandfather will allow it, we will try to arrange for him to see your sister."

"Oh, I'll bring her up here!" cried the child. "I'll bring her up if it takes all day! Oh, if he

could only make her walk! I'd do anything for him if he would!"

"You may tell your grandfather what I say, that I am sure father will see her if he wishes it. He would know whether she can be helped. I am not wise enough to be able to say anything about it."

The little girl shook her head sadly. "Grandfather would n't like it if he knew I had come to see you," she said. "I don't dare tell him; but I'll bring Rosalind up any time you say. She's my sister, and I can do what I like. Benedicta Clapperton has n't anything to do with it!" A bitter shadow crossed the child's face.

Polly looked at her, surprised and questioning.

"I must n't talk about her," said the little girl, as if she had been asked to do so. "Grandfather said for me not to. But could n't I bring Rosalind up to see you without — without your housekeeper's knowing it?"

"Perhaps," answered Polly. "Yet I think that father would have to see your grandfather or grandmother before he examined your sister."

"Then Rosalind can't — ever walk," wailed the little one softly, putting her arm across her eyes to hide her tears.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Polly soothingly, "I think we can arrange it some way."

"No — we ca-n't!" she sobbed. "Grandfather would n't ever take Rosalind to where — Benedicta Clapperton is — I know he would n't!"

"Now, don't you worry one bit about it," comforted Polly, drawing the child to nestle within the circle of her arm. "It will all come out right — you see if it does n't."

"I'm afraid," the little girl confessed.

"Don't be afraid. We won't let Benedicta or anybody else stand in the way of your sister's walking, if it is possible to effect a cure."

The child drew a long breath. "You are good," she said, "awful good; but you don't know grandfather. He hates — oh, I must n't talk about it! What would he say if he knew! I must go now — they will think I'm lost. Bessie is waiting for me somewhere — I forgot all about them!"

"And you will bring Rosalind to see me?"

"Yes, I want you to see her, she is so beautiful!"

"If you will let me know when you can come, I will meet you at the foot of the mountain and bring you up in my car."

"But she drives it, don't she? I saw her that day when she ran into that other car down in Overlook."

"I shall drive the car myself when I come to meet you."

"Oh, then I'd like it!" the child said eagerly. "And I can bring her to-morrow, if it does n't rain."

"And your name?" asked Polly. "I ought to know it, in case something should occur so that I could n't come."

"It is n't a pretty one like Rosalind. I was named for father and mother both. I hate it! It is Oscarlucy — Ferne."

"That is n't a bad name," smiled Polly reassuringly. "Ferne is lovely. I will write it down as soon as I get home."

Polly and Lilith conjectured as to the possible connection between Benedicta and the family of Oscarlucy Ferne; but they came to no definite conclusion.

At half-past five o'clock the sandwiches and cakes were served and eaten; but Benedicta did not appear until going-home time. That she had returned earlier as far as the big birch-tree was affirmed by Grissel, whose sharp eyes had spied her peering between the branches. The picnic seemed to have missed something through the housekeeper's absence.

CHAPTER XXIV

ROSALIND FERNE

BENEDICTA'S tardy presence was briefly apologized for.

"Work's more necessary'n party suppers," she said succinctly.

"I saw yer peekin' through the trees!" piped up Grissel.

A pink flush on Benedicta's cheek was the only response, and Polly quickly filled up the break with a laughable little nothing which turned the children's attention away from the housekeeper.

Benedicta did more than her share of wheeling the children home, as if to make amends for her afternoon's neglect. When the patients were abed she stole out to the veranda where Polly was sitting.

"Come for a little walk!" she said. "Don't you want to?"

They went silently down the steps arm in arm.

"I guess you thought it was queer," she began, "leavin' you so sudden; but that kid was there! How'd she come to be up here on the hill, anyhow?"

Polly explained.

"Oh, that's it! She lives clear the other side o' the town, and I could n't understand."

For a moment the only sound was that of a lone insect. Then Polly said, "Nice little girl she seems to be."

"M-h'm," assented Benedicta.

"Do you know anything about this sister that has never walked?" questioned Polly.

"Not much more'n you do."

"Oscarlucy seems willing to do anything for Rosalind."

"Such a name for a kid!" sniffed Benedicta.

"Rosalind?"

"M-m. I s'pose it's well enough if you like such a hifaluting. It's her grandmother's doin's — she's the queerest! Why, Miss Polly, she's a regular heathen!"

"Heathen! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say! Democrats all are!"

"Benedicta!" laughed Polly. "I never knew a Democrat that was a heathen."

"Well, I have! I don't see how anybody can be a Christian and be a Democrat."

"I know a good many nice Democrats," smiled Polly.

"May be 'nice Democrats,'" scorned the woman, "but I guess ther' ain't anything else nice about 'em!"

"Oh, yes! — "

"See here, Miss Polly Dudley!" — Benedicta's eyes gleamed excitedly — "be you a Democrat?"

"No," Polly laughed, "my people have always been Republicans; but — "

"Well, I'm thankful for that!" Benedicta breathed a big sigh of relief. "For a minute I was scared — clean scared!"

"I never stop to ask what party claims my friends," returned Polly, "although I will acknowledge that I am rather pleased when I discover that we are of the same political belief."

"You ought to be!" replied the housekeeper with emphasis. "I don't have any use for a Republican that gallivants round with Democrats — much less marries 'em!"

Polly marveled, musing over the situation. On what was Benedicta's antagonism founded?

The housekeeper went on, mixing her pronouns.

"'T ain't the only thing she's done, by a long-short; I could tell you plenty. But she won't ever walk — they might know that. Ser — her grandfather does know it, but Oscarlucy — silliest name! — is as crazy as — her grandmother. Why, the kid never's walked a step! Of course, it stands to reason that her legs are all out o' kilter. They've spent lots o' money on her; — but I s'pose she went through with all that."

"She told me they had consulted seven physicians. It looks to me as if the case was beyond medical skill; yet, my father has done unbelievable things along that line."

"He'll never cure Rosalind Ferne! — Did you

ever hear such a melligenous name? If it was mine, I'd apply to the courts and have it changed."

"I never heard 'Ferne' before," said Polly.

"Why, she's had rickets!" continued Benedicta. "They say it was the milk; but I don' know. Why did n't they find out. If I'd been there, I'll bet I'd 'a' known before night what the reason was that baby kept growin' thin! Huh, such a grandmother!"

"You don't seem to like her," remarked Polly.

"Like her!" was the vindictive retort.

Benedicta said no more, and the two soon returned to the house.

For three days nothing was heard from Oscarlucy Ferne. Then Grocer Jack brought up to Polly a tiny note torn from a bit of brown paper. It read, "I am coming this afternoon at two o'clock."

At the time named Polly was at the foot of the hill road, but the children were not in sight. After waiting a long ten minutes she drove ahead slowly, keeping a sharp lookout on all sides for a little girl and a cart and a littler girl. Yet her watching brought her no sight of them. At last, she was about to go back to the place she had started from, when she heard a clatter from behind, and in a moment a horse and wagon appeared, and she saw the familiar face of Grocer Jack and received the information that they thought they could never catch up. On the seat beside the man

were Oscarlucy and a fairy-like little creature with big sky-blue eyes and a mop of fly-away, sunny hair.

"You see," explained Oscarlucy, "Mr. Jack had to carry a barrel of flour 'way up to James Street, and that's why we did n't get there early enough. We were so afraid you'd keep right on, and we could n't get you. Mr. Jack said he knew it was you, because you've got such an easy number on your car. I'm glad you have," she sighed, "or we never should have known it was you."

Polly said that she was glad of the number, and she smiled to the little fairy and thanked Grocer Jack. Then the children were transferred from the grocery wagon to the automobile and Polly learned that the tall grocer could be as gentle in the handling of a frail child as he was nonchalant in the lifting of a heavy barrel. Her esteem for him increased accordingly.

"Is n't Rosalind beautiful?" asked Oscarlucy, after they had talked of the flowers and ferns alongside the mountain road.

Polly was somewhat startled at this frank question, and she simply nodded and smiled over the head of the little one.

"'Most everybody thinks I'm beautiful," said the object of her sister's question; "but grandmother says it is only my hair and my eyes that are so pretty, and that it is a good thing to have something nice when I can't walk at all."

"Indeed, it is," responded Polly, adding, "and I think that your hair and eyes are lovely."

"I am glad you do," returned the tot, "for Oscarlucy was so afraid you would n't. She wants me to have something, you know, to make up for the other. I guess God had n't the heart to make me so I could n't walk and then give me straight black hair and green eyes — like our kitten."

Polly smiled, and somehow managed to give a satisfactory response. What manner of five-year-old was this who talked with such charming unconsciousness about her own beauty and gave voice to original opinions respecting her Creator? Adroitly she led the conversation to other topics.

Throughout that long afternoon Benedicta was not in sight; but Lilith whispered to Polly that the housekeeper was preparing a most delicious-looking luncheon, which in due time appeared on the veranda, — "a truly party tea" Grissel confided to Jozy. And Grissel knew.

Rosalind and her sister enjoyed the afternoon to the utmost, if glad faces and spontaneous laughter were true signs; and Polly and Lilith were kept in a state of expectancy, wondering what their wee visitor would say next.

"It must have taken God an awfully long time to make me," she remarked over the cup-cakes.

"Why?" asked Lilith.

"Because I came so late. 'Most everybody got

here before I did. And He took so much pains with me. Look at my curls! Oscarlucy has tried and tried to curl her hair so it will stay, and she never can. But God curled my hair so it stays. I think it must have taken Him a long time."

The little patients stared at the small girl in big-eyed perplexity. Here was reasoning beyond their thought.

"Is Dr. Dudley coming pretty soon?" she asked, when the goodies had gone their way of delight.

"Yes," answered Polly.

"As soon as next week?"

"Perhaps so."

"As soon as to-morrow?"

"It is barely possible."

"I hope he will," she smiled. "I want to see him so it seems as if I could n't wait."

"So do I," laughed Polly.

"But you can walk!"

Polly nodded. "I want to see him because I love him so much," she explained.

The tiny girl mused over this, and then said very softly: —

"If you love him like that, I think he will cure me. The last doctor I went to see," she continued, "said no doctor on earth could make a child like me walk; but of course he only knew what somebody had told him, and somebody may have told him wrong. There was another doctor I liked better; he had a great deal to say about Dr. Dudley

and he told grandma that if Dr. Dudley could see me he thought he might sud — sud — what was it, Oscarlucy, that he said Dr. Dudley might do?"

"Suggest something," answered her sister promptly.

"Oh, yes, 'sug-gest something,' that was it. And if you love him so much, I am sure he will. I wish he would come to-morrow."

And on the morrow he came, announcing, to the delight of everybody, that he was going to stay a whole week. As soon as practicable Polly sent a note to Oscarlucy, which she answered promptly in person and delivered her message to Polly.

"Grandfather won't come — mercy, I guess he won't! You ought to have heard him storm! — and he won't let me come. Grandmother would, but he won't let her either. He says if Dr. Dudley has a mind to step in some day when he's down to Overlook, and he thinks there's the least bit of use in his coming, he may; but — but — he says — he says" — then she hurried on, the words tumbling from her lips in almost unintelligible fashion — "he says he won't pay out another cent just to be told that Rosalind can't walk, for he knows it already. I don't think that is a bit polite thing to say; but he did pay a doctor fifty dollars once just for his telling him so, and he would n't let me come at all unless I promised I'd say exactly what he told me to. And I've said it!" Oscarlucy snapped

out the last words with a spirit worthy of her grandfather, and it was with difficulty that Polly kept her smile under cover.

When Dr. Dudley called at the Wheatley home Polly at his request accompanied him. The Doctor heard all that the grandparents had to tell before seeing the little one herself. Polly had prepared him for the child's extraordinary beauty, yet he drew a quick breath when he looked upon the frail, angelic little creature. Was there sufficient endurance in that wisp of a frame to outlast the treatment he had in mind?

"I think you are going to cure me," said the mite, smiling up into his kindly face.

He did not respond in words, only gave her one of his rare smiles that had been the comforting life-buoy for many another little one. He reached out and took the wee wrist in his strong hand. He held it so long that Polly began to fear. She watched his face which she knew so well, but it told her nothing.

She followed her father's brief directions swiftly and with skill. She had learned much since that night when she had first taken charge of Paradise Ward.

The grandmother, a white-haired, still beautiful woman, watched the little group with eager interest. She was beginning to believe that this calm, self-contained man possessed something which she had seen in none of the other physicians, and she

followed his every movement with tense nerves and a quickened heart. When at last the examination was over, and they had returned to the living-room, she quietly awaited the Doctor's verdict, quivering lest it should be what she had heard so many times before.

"Are you willing to let your little girl come to the Children's House of Joy for two years?" Dr. Dudley asked.

"You think there is help for her, then?" the grandfather asked.

"I am sure of it. If we can have her for two years, there is almost no doubt of absolute success."

"Why did n't some of those other fellers say that?" queried Mr. Wheatley. "They told me there was no use in doing anything except to keep her comfortable."

"It makes no difference to me what others have said," replied the Doctor. "I know what I know, and I think two years in bed will work wonders."

"Oh, in bed! And if she can't go?"

"She will be a helpless cripple for the rest of her life — which will be short," answered the physician quietly.

"You think that?" asked the man.

"I know it," replied the Doctor.

"Well, I admit that you act like a man who knows a good deal more than most men. I believe that you are speaking truth; still, I don't see how

we can have her go. I have spent about all my savings now, and — "

"Oh, Sereno!" his wife burst out. "Don't think of that! We can get along any way, if only she can be made to walk!"

"How much do you charge a week?" asked Mr. Wheatley.

"We will make the price satisfactory," the Doctor promised. "You may pay only what you can afford to pay."

"But if it is just to keep her in bed," broke in the grandmother eagerly, "why can't she stay at home? I will take care of her — do everything you tell me, same as a nurse."

Dr. Dudley gazed into her pleading eyes, as if to read her through and through; but she did not flinch, she met his own steadily.

"I am inclined to think," he said at last, "that this may be the better plan. There is one strong point in its favor, — the air here is purer than ours." He smiled back to her. "Suppose we take her up on the mountain, where I can keep watch of her as long as I stay, and let her remain there until my daughter is ready to go home. She will have the children for company, and that will be a good thing for her."

"No, sir!" came in thunderous tones from the man by the table. His big fist came down on his knee as he spoke.

His wife crossed over to him and began to talk

in her gentle way, so softly that the others heard but a word now and then. At first the man would have none of her arguments; but presently, with a mollified "Have it your own way, then," he got up and took a seat nearer the Doctor.

Thus it was settled, but when the details were arranged nobody was present save the two men. Grandmother and Polly had gone to share the happy news with Oscarlucy and Rosalind.

The elder girl broke into quiet weeping; but the little one smiled triumphantly.

"I knew he would make me walk!" she said.

CHAPTER XXV

THE STORM

DR. ABBE asked at breakfast, "Miss Dudley, can you spare Miss Brooks and me for the day?"

Lilith looked up, her face full of astonishment.

Involuntarily Polly glanced from one to the other.

"Certainly, Dr. Abbe," she smiled.

Lilith held her breath, wide-eyed and scarlet of cheek.

"I wanted to be sure," said the Doctor, "for fear the lady would plead lack of time."

Then, turning to Lilith, he said, a twinkle of mischief in his brown eyes: —

"Miss Brooks, would you like to go to Skyboro, to see a granduncle and grandaunt of mine? They are pleasant, old-fashioned people, and very hospitable. I think you would like them."

"Thank you, Dr. Abbe," answered Lilith, with a smiling little bow, "I should be delighted to go; but how do you propose to make the journey? I believe neither of us can drive the car, and my wings are not here."

"Thank you," laughed the Doctor. "I am hoping that Miss Dudley will offer to take us down to the Overlook station."

Which Polly hastened to do, accompanied by a burst of laughter.

It was one of those mornings that was sunny on the mountain-top, while heavy mists lay along the valleys and obscured the lower hills. "We'll have thunder before night," prophesied Benedicta, as she bade the carload good-bye from the piazza. "Better take your umbrella!" But the clear sunshine around them made her advice seem a joke, and it was received only with amusement.

Polly's drive alone up the mountain gave her a wonderful sense of peace. The restful, upreaching pines; the gleeful brooks; the great ferns; the joyous birds; the landscape in its sunny content; — all these ministered to her spirit, until she felt as if nothing could ever trouble her again.

In this happy mood she would have liked to choose some nook apart from the others and read and dream in company with one of her favorite authors. But she had many tasks, and to-day was crowded with them because of Lilith's absence. So with singing in her heart and on her lips she put away small garments and brought out fresh ones, mopped and dusted, gave drinks of water to occupants of pillowed chairs, fetched books and pictures and games, and did countless other things with smiling good cheer and happy words that went a very long way towards making her small patients comfortable and glad.

"Guess I'll can some of these blueberries,"

Benedicta told her on one of her trips to the kitchen. "A man came along with them early, and I bought more than I realized. He gave me bouncing good measure, and there seems to be a superfluity — see those panfuls!" She pointed to the heaped-up fruit.

"I'm glad you bought them," returned Polly. "I never tire of blueberries, fresh or cooked."

"Well," went on the housekeeper, a pleased, relieved look on her face, "I knew you liked 'em. So do I. And I've got time to can to-day; there is n't going to be any man to dinner. You'll be glad of them next winter. Blueberry cake won't go amiss when the wind is howling round the hospital and the snow is three feet deep."

"We don't often have three feet of snow down our way," laughed Polly; "but blueberry cake will taste just as well even if the snow does lack a foot or two."

"I think I will come down and visit you in snow-time," returned Benedicta.

"Do!" cried Polly. "And be sure to bring your recipe book along!"

"I certainly shall — when I come," chuckled Benedicta.

"You'll come," returned Polly authoritatively. "I shan't give you any peace until you do."

Out on the veranda the children amused themselves in quiet ways. It was too hot for much liveliness, although an animated argument was going

on between Grissel and Clementina as to which was the "nicest," Polly or Lilith or the White Nurse or Benedicta. Finally Polly's stories appeared to offset — even with the opposite party — Benedicta's cookies and tarts, while Lilith's picture plays weighed heavily against Mrs. Daybill's word games which could be indulged in at any time, even in the midst of a bath. The battle was not over when Polly appeared with a pitcher of lemonade and a tray of glasses.

The little folks shrieked with delight, and several of the boldest clamored for a story to attend their refreshment.

So Polly, always bent on pleasing and glad of a brief respite from her duties, told them a long tale of the "Golden Horse," who, weary of his work as a whirling weathervane, became envious of the birds and longed to fly, but who, after a short journey through the air on the wings of a thunder-storm, was content to return to the duty for which he was fitted and thereafter lived in happiness, the beloved of a little boy in the house below.

"I should rather be a vane than to ride on the wings of a thunder-storm," shuddered Jozy. "Ugh! would n't I be afraid!"

"Aw, I would n't!" boasted Timmy. "I love to hear it thunder."

"Guess you would n't if you had to ride up in the air right along with it," retorted Jozy. "Any-

way, you don't like the lightning, 'cause you said you did n't last time it did!"

"Who does?" grinned Timmy, now sure of his ground in the present company.

There was a general laugh, under cover of which Polly hastened away to her few remaining tasks.

Upstairs she glanced from a window to see that thunder-caps were assembling in the western sky. She thought of Benedicta's prophecy, and smiled. Perhaps Lilith and the Doctor might need an umbrella after all. Then she sighed a little — some of the children were always afraid in an electric storm, and once there had been a small panic. She dreaded them on that account.

Down in the kitchen she found Timmy. One could usually be sure of Timmy wherever the housekeeper and cooking were going on.

"Had n't you better go out on the veranda?" Polly suggested. "I'm afraid you'll bother Benedicta. She's going to can blueberries."

"Oh, Miss Dudley, I want to see her can blueberries!" was his prompt answer.

"He's never been too numerous yet," averred the housekeeper. "When he is I'll send him away."

"Can I come, too?" begged Jozy from the doorway.

"No, I think you'd better not," answered Polly from the stairs.

"Yes, come right in!" called Benedicta.

Polly went on with a smiling sigh. Benedicta was surely spoiling those children.

It was four o'clock when Polly heard the first mutterings of thunder. She had lain down for a few minutes, as was her custom at this hour, and she had fallen asleep. The thunder had probably wakened her. She arose and hastened downstairs; some of the children might be growing nervous.

In the ward nobody was stirring. Esther Tenniel had been playing with post-cards and had dropped back on her pillow. Jozy and Clementina and Grissel were drowsing in wheel-chairs. Muriel Spencer and Annette Lacouchière were looking at picture books. Little Duke and Dolly Merrifield were asleep on the veranda, with Mrs. Daybill keeping guard over all and deep in a book as well. The kitchen was empty of life except for a droning fly or two.

Outside a cooler breeze was ruffling everything within reach. The sky had changed. The sun was still shining with a weird brightness, making the heaped-up clouds in the northwest seem blacker in contrast. The rumbles of thunder grew into growls.

"We are going to have a shower," said the White Nurse to Polly who stood scanning the sky.

Polly nodded. "Where's Benedicta?"

"I saw her go over to the Study. The boys are asleep — or were when I left them half an hour ago."

Polly went inside.

Jozy was awake, anxious-eyed.

"Is there going to be a thunder-shower?" she questioned tremulously.

"It looks a little like it," Polly answered in cheerful tone. "If we have one I will tell you a story."

"Oh, dear!" Jozy gave a half-laugh. "I don't know what to do now. I want the story — but I don't want it to lighten."

"Probably the storm won't last long," was the reply. "They are not apt to up here. Maybe it won't come at all."

Polly went on, into the kitchen, where Benedicta's fruit-filled jars stood in a prim row on the table. Always thereafter, the terrible storm was associated in her memory with that long line of canned blueberries.

Passing out to the piazza, a troubled look came over her face. Instinctively she wished that Dr. Abbe was there. A man is always so convenient if anything happens. Polly had never seen so gruesome a sky. Blackness was gathering overhead, dense blackness that seemed to be embracing the mountain, while far in the northwest zigzags of lightning against a dull coppery sky were appalling in number and incessancy.

She ran across and shut the doors of the garage and then returned to the piazza.

The wind veered to the north and darkness sud-

denly enveloped the house. A gust slammed the door behind her, and Polly hurried inside and began to shut doors and windows ahead of the oncoming storm. Sheets of rain dashed into her face as she darted here and there. Before she had finished her task a terrific clap halted her in the middle of the children's dormitory, just as the White Nurse came from the front veranda with Dolly in her arms.

"Is n't it awful!" cried Mrs. Daybill. And laying the child on a bed, she started back to the veranda door.

A deafening, splitting crash brought an outcry from the children, and Benedicta dashed into the kitchen, a boy in her arms, both streaming with water.

"Where's that — fire put-outer?" she gasped. "Quick! Study's struck! All afire! Two boys more there!"

In a moment Benedicta and Mrs. Daybill with the extinguisher were racing across to the Study, while Polly rushed to rescue Little Duke who was still on the veranda. To her horror she found him limp and unconscious, a shivered, blackened floor telling the story. Inside she tried remedy after remedy, to the accompaniment of shrieking, panic-stricken children, and a tumultuous heart full of sickening fear.

Benedicta and the nurse returned with Timmy and Jeffy and reported the fire out.

Mrs. Daybill took Polly's place by Little Duke. The boy though still breathing was unconscious.

"I think he will come out all right in a few minutes," she assured Polly; yet the moments passed and he remained the same.

Meanwhile the storm lingered, but the thunderbolts seemed not quite so near.

Polly stood over the child holding his wrist. "I'm going to Overlook for a doctor!" she announced, darting toward the kitchen.

"Indeed, you are not!" vetoed Benedicta. "If anybody goes, that's me!"

"No, no!" cried Polly. "I — "

"Teeters and tongs!" broke in the housekeeper, "I'm goin'!" And pushing the girl gently back she dashed off, her dress leaving a trail of drops on the polished floor.

"Oh, don't go!" pleaded Mrs. Daybill, as a heavy crash overhead and a dazzling glare through the room told that the storm was still with them.

"It's 'most over!" called Benedicta. "I'll be all right." She was putting on rubbers over her drenched slippers. Then she took her raincoat from its nail behind the door, and crossed the kitchen.

Polly ran out.

"You can't control the car in this rain," she urged, seizing Benedicta's arm. "You must not go!"

"Let me alone! I'll put on the chains."

The door shut behind her, and shortly the car had started on its trip down the mountain.

The children were whimpering. Little Duke lay white and motionless; only the soft breathing told of life.

"She'll be struck and die, just like Little Duke!" wailed Clementina. Which was the signal for a general shower of tears.

"Don't! Don't!" begged Mrs. Daybill. "Little Duke is n't dead and he is n't going to be! He is only stunned. He'll be all right before the doctor gets here — see if he is n't!"

The cheery tone more than the words soothed the frightened children, and something like quiet began to prevail. Little Duke was now in bed, Polly doing what she could in his behalf.

It was long before Benedicta returned. The storm had passed, though clouds hung dark and heavy above Overlook Mountain. It was dusky inside. Polly stepped out on the veranda, to see if the doctor had come. The car seemed to be full — yes, Lilith and Dr. Abbe were there and another man besides. He jumped out, and Polly caught her breath — it was David Collins!

CHAPTER XXVI

CLEMENTINA ASKS QUESTIONS

LITTLE DUKE rapidly recovered from his shock, and the sudden arrival of David Collins gave the entire household something to think of besides the storm. Polly alone bore the brunt of the surprise. She had felt vaguely that sometime this must come — her meeting again with David; but she had thrust aside the thought of it as something not of the present. His appearance, therefore, caught her unprepared, and she suffered in consequence. Yet, so complete was her self-control that none except Lilith guessed of her timorous heart or her aversion to her unexpected guest.

She had asked no questions of Benedicta concerning the coming of David, but on the morning after his arrival she accidentally overheard the explanation as well as several other things.

"Where did you find Mr. Collins?" Clementina was asking the housekeeper as she lingered in the kitchen after breakfast.

"I did n't find him," was the answer. "He found me."

"Where'bouts?" persisted the child.

"Why, he was on his way to the garage, when

he spied the number of my car — or Miss Dudley's car, I should say — and he raced after me, yellin' at the top of his voice. He s'posed it was Miss Polly inside. I guess he was amazin'ly flabbergasted when he saw me drivin'," she chuckled.

"What's 'flapper—grasted'?" questioned Clementina.

"Oh, just a good deal surprised," was the quiet answer.

"Why did n't you say so, then? It's lots easier."

"It does n't tell so much," replied Benedicta.

"I think it tells more. How did Dr. Abbe and Miss Brooks know you were down there?"

"They did n't. I heard the train come in, so I thought I'd see if they'd come. And there they were!"

"Had they got married?"

"Married! I should hope not! What put that into your head?"

"Why, a girl that lived in the next room to me before I lived with Miss Dudley went off to the shore with a feller one day and when they come back they were married."

"Huh! we ain't that kind up here."

"Anyway, Dr. Abbe's her beau, ain't he?"

"Not that I know of."

"I don't see why," muttered Clementina. "Who did that Mr. Collins come to see?"

"Miss Polly, he said."

"Did she ask him?"

"I don't know."

"Is he her beau?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know very much, do you?"

"I don't know much about beaux and I don't want to!"

"Why don't you want to?"

"Because I don't! I should if it was n't for that."

"Don't you like 'em? I do."

"Much you know about 'em."

"I do! I'm goin' to have a beau and I'm goin' to marry him when I grow up."

"Sinners and snobs! You'd better be playin' with your dolls than talkin' about gett'n' married."

"Why had I? I think it's awful lovely to get married in a long white satin dress and a veil and a bouquet and go to New York."

"Huh! you're a great kid."

"Why am I?"

"Teeters and tongs! if you don't stop I shan't know whether I'm makin' cocoa gingerbread or coastin' down Overlook Hill."

"Oh! may I have a piece when it's baked?"

"I'll see, if you'll run away now and let me be."

"If you don't want me, I s'pose I'll have to," plaintively.

Nothing further came to Polly's ears, except the patter of small footsteps, which told her of Clementina's retreat.

Why did Benedicta allow them to bother her and resent it almost as interference when Polly remonstrated?

Now Clementina's thin voice was piping out again.

"Say, how soon will the cocoa gingerbread be done?"

"Oh, not for a good bit!"

"Say, don't you think Dolly Merrifield's brother is an awful lovely gentleman?"

"I guess so."

"He's beautifuller than any of the other gentlemen, is n't he?"

"Yere."

"Why don't he be Miss Polly's beau? They look sweet together."

"Teeters and tongs! What's got into you?"

"There is n't any cocoa gingerbread inside o' me!" resented Clementina.

"Nor there won't be unless you stay out of here!" Benedicta's voice was as nearly impatient as it ever came to be with the children.

"I don't know where to wait," complained the child.

"Go and see Grissel and Dolly and the rest."

"I ain't a wheel-chair one."

"Well, I'll make you one if you don't go this minute!"

Which dreadful threat sent the little feet off again, not to return within Polly's hearing.

Although there were tasks still awaiting her, she lingered by her window long after her mending was finished and the garments folded ready to be put away. The questioning that had floated up to her from the kitchen had flooded her mind with thoughts that would not be thrust out, and she brooded over them with troubled brow and restless fingers.

As yet she had said little to David. She had resolved not to be left alone with him if she could prevent it, although she felt that it was only delaying a sure occurrence. If he had been arrogant or assuming, as at the last time she saw him, she felt that things would have been easier for her; but he was cordial without assumption and genial without familiarity. He had rarely, she thought, appeared in so attractive a light — and yet — and yet — Polly knew that she had no love to give him, that she never could have any love for him again. Had he killed it by his faithless behavior, or had she never loved him? She could not tell. If there had been any real love in her heart for David Collins, of this she was confident, none of it was left. Still, she dreaded to tell him so. She vowed there in the silence of her room that she would not let herself be led into a position from which there was no escape.

Early after breakfast David had proposed going down to Overlook but Polly had excused herself for lack of time. Lilith, promptly taking her cue from

Polly, had many duties which must be performed at once, and so on. Mrs. Daybill would gladly have accepted the invitation, but was unwilling to go unless one of the girls would be of the party. So it came about that Dr. Abbe and David went off in the car alone. Polly hoped fervently that they would not return before noon. She chided herself for her attitude towards David, yet she was unable to bring her mind to any dearer feeling for him than kindliness.

Finally she rose and was putting away her mended garments when the purring of a motor car caught her ear. Drawing a little sigh she speeded her work and started towards the front window. Short of it she halted. That car was not hers. She watched it round the corner — Was that — ? It was! "Nita!" she whispered joyously and flew down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BUTTERFLY LADY STAYS

NELSON RANDOLPH drew up his car before the chalet as Polly dashed out of the door. A flutter of hands greeted her, and then she and Mrs. Randolph were in each other's arms. Miss Crilly came next, and Mr. Randolph and Blue and Doodles were not far behind.

"I am so glad to see you," laughed Polly, "I don't know what to say. You have n't come up from Fair Harbor this morning?"

"We have," they answered.

"Started at five o'clock!" said Miss Crilly.

"And ate our breakfast on the way," put in Doodles.

"Gee! is n't this 'way up!" cried Blue, turning to see the wide circle of mountains with which they were surrounded.

"It's good and cool," broke out Miss Crilly. "Oo-oo, but it was hot down in some of those places!"

"We always get a breeze," said Polly. "Come right up on the veranda and take off your things."

"Do let me look around a minute! How beautiful it is! I don't wonder you called it the 'Top of the World.'" Juanita Randolph gazed admiringly

on every side. "It is wonderful!" she said softly. "And how well you are looking!" — throwing an arm round Polly's slim waist.

"The Butterfly Lady," as she was called by some of the children, greeted the small patients with smiles and handshakes and cheery words. They were very fond of her, and the name given her by Clementina Cunio, on the occasion of her wearing an exquisite dress of black-and-gold, fitted her well this morning as she passed joyously from one to another. It is not surprising that their faces were bright with pleasure as she made her happy way among the wheel-chairs and told her small friends how glad she was to see them again.

Benedicta always appeared to be in her chosen sphere when guests beloved of Polly were at the house. Now, as soon as she knew of the party's arrival, she promptly began planning what rarely delicious dishes she could concoct.

"Which do you think they'd rather have," she asked, — "stuffed beefsteak, or brown London chop, or chicken fried in cream?"

Polly advised chicken, and the dinner, with its array of vegetables, salads, breads, and pies, was enjoyed by the visitors with appreciative words and voted by the family to be the cap of Benedicta's records.

Dr. Abbe and David Collins came in just as the meal was served, and David's appearance on Overlook Mountain was astonishing to at least

one of the guests. Knowing how matters had stood between the two when Polly left home, Mrs. Randolph's mind was given more to a study of the possible situation than to the chicken over which Benedicta had reddened her face with patient unconcern.

It was not until hours afterwards, when Polly had Nita and Miss Crilly upstairs in her own room, that the girl approached the question which had been in her heart ever since they had come.

"You are going to stay a few days with me, are n't you?" she asked, quivering with eagerness.

"Oh, no! we must go back to-night," Mrs. Randolph answered.

Polly shook her head. "You must not! I am going to keep you for a week, at least. No, hear me through! Miss Crilly will — I see by her face."

"Oh, I should be perfectly delighted!" that little woman beamed; "but — "

"There is n't any 'but,'" resumed Polly.

"I guess Mr. Randolph will think he is a big 'but,'" laughed his wife.

"I'll manage it with him," promised her hostess, "unless you really don't want to stay — and in that case I'll make you want to."

They laughed, and the girl went on.

"Give me one good reason for not staying!" she demanded, facing her friend with determination in her eyes.

"Why, we did n't intend to — "

"No good!" broke in Polly. "Give me a better."

"Well — this should really have come first — I ought not to leave Nelson — "

"Nonsense! He's perfectly well, is n't he?"

"Yes, only — "

"No 'onlys' allowed. I told you I'd manage him. Is that all?"

Miss Crilly was laughing, and Mrs. Randolph followed.

"You'd be the same old Polly if you lived to be a hundred," she said. "Truly, dear, I don't see how I can — "

"It's all settled," announced the girl quietly — "you and Miss Crilly are going to stay a week, anyway — maybe longer."

They began to demur, but Polly laughingly held up a warning finger. And immediately she branched off into plans for the next few days.

"We'll go to Mirror Lake for one place," she told them. "I wish I could include Mr. Randolph and the boys in my invitation. I could eat them, as — who is it says that? — but I can't sleep them."

Miss Crilly went off in a spasm of laughter, while Polly continued.

"You two can share our beds, Lilith's and mine; for we have n't another extra one in the whole establishment. Mrs. Gresham says she is going to put up a new bungalow next summer, so we can have as much company as we want; this season we

get along any way. We live out of doors mostly. Pumpelly Falls is another beautiful spot, and the drive is pretty, too. Then, there are some lovely tramps on our own mountains — oh, there's no end to the places you must see! One week — why, it won't be any time at all! You'll have to stay two."

They were called downstairs and invited to join a party bound for a little lake a mile or so away.

"It is worth going to see," said Lilith.

"It's awful lovely there!" piped up Clementina, who hung about hoping for an invitation.

Under cover of the laugh that followed the child's remark Polly started for the stairs, fearful lest David would claim her for the ramble.

Mrs. Randolph was not far behind, and in the moment they were alone Polly whispered, "May I have your husband for the afternoon? I can't go with David, and I'm so afraid he'll ask me."

"Of course," returned Nita, "but I don't understand. Is it as bad as that?"

"I don't want to be alone with him — you will help me out, won't you?"

"You poor child! You shan't be a minute with him if you don't want to be. I'll stick to you like a burr!"

"Oh, thank you! And you'll stay here till he goes?"

"I surely will."

"You blessed Nita! I feel guilty, when he is our

guest; but I don't see what he came up here for — *I* did n't ask him."

"Not ready yet?" broke in Miss Crilly's laughing voice. "Please, somebody see if my hat's on straight."

"Yes; but you don't want any hat. Leave it here. Let me fluff up your hair a bit — there, that's all right. Now we're ready."

The afternoon passed in gala-day fashion. The party paired off as it happened, but although the others changed partners more than once, Polly walked with Nelson Randolph from the door of the chalet to the lakeside and back again.

That evening was one forever to be remembered. At the request of Mrs. Randolph, Doodles had brought his violin, and he and Polly and David played and sang from directly after tea until ten o'clock, when Mr. Randolph and the two boys left for Overlook, where they were to spend the night. Never had the little patients known such a musical feast. And Benedicta — she tells it best herself.

"I've heard music before; but this was n't the regular kind; it was something so amazin'ly overmastering that I lost myself consummately, and when it got through I did n't honestly know where I was. That little Doodles — my! I could hear the birds singin' before sunrise just as plain, crooning an' twittering as they will when it's comin' light, and then breakin' out fit to burst their little throats, tryin' to say good-morning to all the world

at once! And in that other one I could see the sun dippin' right down into a bed of gold, and the girl and feller that were in love with each other — why, I almost heard what they were whisperin'! — How does he do it! — that's what I want to know — how does he do it? — just with those strings and a bow!"

In the duet sung by Polly and David, most innocently asked for by Nelson Randolph, Polly had to summon all her strength to control her face and her voice. She would have declined, but David responded readily enough, and she would not be outdone by him.

"If I cared for David now," she afterwards told Nita, "I could never have sung it. All that troubled me was that it brought back the last night we sang together, when I loved him — or thought I did — and once or twice the memory almost overpowered me. But if you and Lilith say I did n't show it, I will try to believe you."

David Collins, despite his seeming nonchalance at the start, had not been at his best as he went on. Once he took a false note; but whether because he was out of practice or from some other reason those who talked it over together could not decide.

David's attitude in respect to herself Polly did not understand. She was taking all possible tasks upon her shoulders in order to avoid him. Nita, true to her promise, accompanied her hostess like a shadow, thus effectually hindering David from

any effort he might wish to make to see her alone. Last June if he had been thwarted in his attempts as she was thwarting him at present, he would have gone about black of face and gloomy of manner, making it apparent to everybody that he considered himself as being ill-used. Yet now he smiled genially to all and was seemingly at peace with himself and the world. Could it be that up in the great woods he had learned self-control? Or was he actually as contented as he seemed? Perhaps — Polly's heart quickened with sudden hope — he had fallen in love with somebody else and was here only to obtain his freedom from the bonds under which he might believe himself in honor to be held. The joy was brief. David Collins was not one to feel bound to anybody or anything not agreeable to himself. She sighed. No, that explanation of his present conduct was scarcely practicable. Polly admitted to herself that David was far more attractive in this new rôle than he had been in the old. No wonder Marietta said that he was changed. With the thought of Marietta she returned to her former supposition, and which she had set aside as not to be entertained. David had always liked Marietta, and the girl herself had plainly enough been bent on winning him. Had he been won over? Polly wished it could be so — yes, ardently wished it — thereby proving to herself beyond any further doubt that her love — if love it had ever been — was love no longer. She could

see him wedded to Marietta without the breath of a sigh. If only he were not taking their engagement for granted, as he once did! She shuddered at the possibility.

"Are you sure, Polly, that you are not making a mistake?" Juanita Randolph asked, on the fourth afternoon of her visit.

They had come up to the grove back of the house, where Sardis Merrifield had heard the story of the "Ten Little Girls." Polly looked up from her crocheting, her eyes questioning.

"What about?"

"About David. Are you positive that you do not care for him?"

The blood sprang into Polly's face, and mounted to her hair.

"I know," she replied simply.

"I wondered — that is all," Mrs. Randolph said, as if in apology.

"Were n't you sure whether you loved Mr. Randolph or not?"

"Perfectly sure — from the first." It was the other's face that pinked this time.

"And you made me believe you did n't care a rap about him, in fact, hated him!" chided Polly.

Mrs. Randolph laughed softly. "I had no idea that he would ever care for me."

"I thought he did until we heard that story about Blanche Puddicombe. I am sorry for the man she married."

The elder woman shook her head with a bit of a sigh. "I wonder if she liked Nelson."

"He did n't like her," smiled Polly, "and she had no business to care for him. Probably she did n't. Oh, how delighted I was that night you told me that you were engaged to him!"

"When I ran a race with Miss Sniffen," added Mrs. Randolph.

Polly laughed at the remembrance. "If I could have seen it! You had a good time from then on, did n't you?"

"Nelson would make anybody have a good time," praised his wife. Her face grew grave. "David is a very attractive young man," she said.

"Yes, he does seem so now," agreed Polly. "He was n't last June."

"Perhaps he has left his disagreeable qualities in the Adirondacks."

"I hope so." Polly's eyes went troubled. "Nita," she accused, "you think I ought to let David come back! You know, there was never any engagement. And he 's been away from me all summer — without a word."

"There can be no obligation about it — if you are sure of your own heart — " she paused.

"I am sure," Polly reiterated, with a flutter of red upon her cheeks.

Juanita Randolph watched her as she bent towards her work.

"I am thankful," the girl resumed, "that I re-

fused to make any promise for life. A girl of thirteen is too young to know her own mind, much less her own heart."

"You are right," replied the other. "A girl of that age rarely knows what love is."

"I did n't know," Polly said with emphasis.

After a moment Mrs. Randolph spoke again.

"I wonder if David is waiting for me to go."

"Probably."

"Don't you suppose — don't you think it might be better to have it over with him? Then it would be off your mind."

Polly shook her head. "I don't dare to let it come now. Maybe I am a coward; but I am afraid he would out-argue me."

"And you think it will be better later?"

Polly's eyes had a sad, far-away look as she gazed at Dolly's ducks taking a swim down the brook.

"It seems as if it would be easier — at home. I must wait. David is a good talker when he sets out to win his point — I am afraid."

"I see," nodded the other.

"Maybe. But you can't — quite. I could only say that I am going to be a nurse, and that I don't love him. Then he would accuse me of almost everything — I know David. When I go back — well, maybe I'll write him a letter."

Juanita laughed. "You won't be a nurse all your life. You cannot convince me of that."

"Yes, I have decided." She crocheted hard. "I love it, and after I'm through college I shall take a course of training, specializing on children — I have it all planned."

"I am still an unbeliever," smiled Mrs. Randolph. Then she pondered the subject in silence, straying far, far from the right path.

For a time matters went on at Sunrise Chalet without much change. Mrs. Randolph began to feel anxious about being away from home, although she appeared to be in the gayest of moods. David was growing more serious of deportment; — what his thoughts were nobody knew. Polly smiled to everybody alike, but lay awake nights wondering if this chain of tangles would ever be straightened out. Benedicta expressed her mind on more than one occasion.

"Is n't it amazin' queer," she said, on the eighth day of Mrs. Randolph's visit, "how some people can hang on to a place when they have n't any requisition there at all! What's the matter with that Collins feller, anyway? The Butterfly Lady was invited; but he was n't, was he?"

Polly shook her head.

"Then, why, by the authority of common sense, don't he say good-bye, and trot?"

It was on the day after these remarks that Polly was near the window of the children's ward when she heard footsteps on the veranda, and she held her breath. They were David's footsteps!

Why did she leave the veranda door open? She had supposed that David had gone away with Dr. Abbe. He had never ventured into the ward; still —

"You think a good deal of the Butterfly Lady, don't you?" It was David's voice.

Grissel and Esther had not been sleepy and had begged to be allowed to remain on the piazza during nap-time. So there they were still, playing with the paper dolls that Mrs. Randolph had brought them.

"I think she's lovely," responded Grissel.

"I suppose she will be going home pretty soon," went on David's voice.

"No, sir, she is n't!" answered Grissel eagerly. "She told us she was goin' to stay a good while."

Polly smiled.

"Oh!" returned David in a tone that hinted of disappointment.

That was all, save the rustling of paper and the soft whispers of the girls. If only nobody woke up, he need not know that she was there. If she could go upstairs without passing that door!

Presently David spoke again.

"Will you hand that to Miss Dudley when you see her."

"I'll carry it now. I guess she's in her room."

Polly sat tense — if Esther should come in! It was Esther that had answered. Grissel could not walk.

"No," David was saying, "wait until you see her. She may be resting."

Polly flushed guiltily. She felt unworthy of such consideration from David.

A chair moved on the piazza, and she heard him go down the steps. As soon as practicable she got up noiselessly and tiptoed across to the staircase. With a breath of relief she shut the door of her own room. Nobody had seen her come up.

When she and Mrs. Randolph and Miss Crilly went for their afternoon walk they left the house by way of the kitchen.

At the tea-table Polly saw David looking keenly at her, and then once again. Both times she turned her eyes quickly; she did not even glance at him the third time, and he did not speak to her directly during the meal. Afterwards she helped Mrs. Randolph and Miss Crilly put the children to bed, and then they joined Mrs. Daybill on the veranda. Lilith and Dr. Abbe and David did not appear until late. Then David looked grave and forbidding. He scarcely spoke.

Polly wondered what had become of the note — if it were a note — that David had wished Esther to give her.

At breakfast David addressed Polly directly.

"I must be going down to Fair Harbor," he said. "Are you willing I should take your car down the mountain?"

"Certainly," answered Polly, "if you feel that you must go."

"I have been away from home too long already," he replied. "Will you go down with me, to bring the car back?" he asked, meeting her eyes squarely.

For an almost imperceptible instant she hesitated. Then she answered, "Why, yes, thank you, I shall be glad to go."

He smiled. The hour was set. Dr. Abbe and the others expressed regrets; but Polly said nothing further.

Mrs. Randolph and Miss Crilly and Lilith demurred when Polly asked them to accompany David and herself to Overlook.

"He did not invite us," they said.

"I am inviting you," returned Polly, and she would take only their acceptance.

David looked crestfallen, so Miss Crilly affirmed, when he saw the bevy of ladies ready to go down to Overlook. But he accepted his fate gracefully, and the ride turned out to be pleasant to at least three of the passengers.

At the Overlook station David caught a brief chance to say a word to Polly.

"Why did n't you meet me last evening, or at least answer my note?" he demanded quietly.

She looked up in innocent surprise.

"I have n't received any note from you," she answered, her face scarlet at once.

"Did n't that little girl who was playing with Grissel on the veranda yesterday afternoon hand you the note I gave her for you?"

"No," she reiterated. "She gave me nothing."

He laughed a little. "Forgot it, probably! So much for trusting to a kid's memory. I waited for you up in the woods till ten o'clock."

"Too bad!" she faltered.

"H'm," he returned. "Well, I'll see you when you are back in Fair Harbor. I might write — shall I?"

"Why, yes, if you like," she answered.

"Perhaps — I think on the whole I'd rather wait till you come home."

The train was thundering in; there was no more time. With a grasp of the hand and a grave good-bye, he turned, and Polly saw him disappear in the car.

The next day Mrs. Randolph and Miss Crilly said good-bye, too. The little family on Overlook Mountain was by itself again.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BENEDICTA'S OPPORTUNITY

IT was not until Polly returned from taking her last guests to the Overlook train that she inquired of Esther Tenniel about the note with which David had entrusted her.

At the start the little girl smiled into Polly's eyes in happy forgetfulness of her failure in duty until suddenly memory asserted itself. Then she hid her face in her little hands and broke into a wailing cry.

"Oh, Miss Dudley, I forgot! I forgot! I never did think of it till this minute! I told that sweet young man I would give it to you, and now I don't know where it is. Oh, Miss Dudley!"

"Hush, dear," said Polly soothingly. "It is n't of the least consequence. I think it is not lost, and if it is, I shall not shed a single tear. Don't cry another bit."

The child continued to sob, while Polly, with her usual practicality, went on:—

"You were playing with your paper dolls that morning, were n't you?"

"Yes, Miss Dudley — the beautiful ones — that the Butterfly Lady gave us."

Polly went to the cupboard where they were

kept and looked through the envelopes. The note was not among the dolls.

"Do you remember what you wore that day?"

Esther reflected. "I think I had on my blue gingham and the white pinafore that goes with it."

Polly examined Esther's wardrobe, but did not see the white "pinafore." Then she went to the big laundry hamper and looked over the clothes. The missing apron soon was in her hands, and down in the depths of the little pocket was the note.

Esther smiled wanly when she saw it, and began to cry.

"I want to tell you a secret," said Polly. "You'll promise not to repeat it to anybody?" Then said Polly, "I am glad you forgot! I would a great deal rather have the note now than when it was given you."

Esther looked at her doubtingly. "Glad?" she queried.

"Yes, really and truly glad," laughed Polly. "Now go and play and forget all about it."

"And I need n't feel sorry?" questioned the little girl.

"No, you are to be glad, too."

Esther smiled and flung her arms about Polly's neck, whispering, "You are the nicest lady that ever was!"

Alone with the note, Polly did not open it at

once. She sat still with her own thoughts. Finally she unfolded the paper, and read: —

DEAR POLLY: I must see you alone, and somebody is always tagging you round. Please arrange your work so as to meet me up in the grove this evening. I shall be there directly after tea.

Sincerely

DAVID

Polly looked away to the far distant hills — wondering about David. What did he come for? What had he to say to her? Would it have been better if she had let him talk with her, as he wished — as Nita had suggested? No, she could not! She knew well enough what it would have led to. She shook her head, and a shiver ran over her — anything but *that!* Yes, she had done right.

Rosalind Ferne improved daily, and the gain was not microscopic. Even Benedicta spoke of it.

"That Ferne kid's comin' up," she said.

"Is n't she!" exulted Polly.

"She'll never walk," the housekeeper went on, "it's against nature; but she'll get stronger and healthier. She won't go through life so puny."

"Or crooked," added Polly.

"I do' know!" Benedicta shook her head doubtfully. "I s'pose I ought not to go in opposition to your father, but it ain't reasonable to think she will walk and be straight after all these years of idleness."

"She will be straight and she will walk," Polly asserted smilingly. "Father knows what he says. He never makes a statement that he is not able to back up with results."

"Well" — Benedicta drew a long, doubtful breath — "if she ever should — but I don't b'lieve she will! — it will be a real authentic miracle."

"It will seem so," agreed Polly, "yet it is just such things that father is doing every day."

The housekeeper looked at her with unbelieving eyes. "Do you mean that your father has ever cured anybody that was like that little Ferne kid?"

"A good many of them. You know about Doodles?"

"No. What?"

"When he was three or four years old he had a fall and could never walk a step afterwards until father operated upon him some six years ago."

"Well, that's amazin'ly marvelous, of course; but they've taken that kid to piles of doctors, and every one of 'em said she could n't be cured."

"Yes," smiled Polly. "And Doodles was examined by a famous New York surgeon just before father saw him; his verdict was that the case was utterly hopeless."

"He did! Sinners and snobs! Why in the universe don't you do some braggin'? Bet I would, if it was my father."

The girl laughed. "I believe in him thor-

oughly," she said. "That's better than braggardism."

"My! but that's a lovely word!" cried Benedicta. "Say it again, please; I never heard it."

Polly repeated it. "When I was a child," she laughed, "I used to say 'superbondonjical.' Maybe that would suit you."

"Fine! What does it mean?"

"I used it for anything that especially pleased me," Polly replied.

"All right," returned Benedicta. "I think, then, that you are superbondonjical."

Clementina came to see what they were laughing at, and Polly took the opportunity to escape into the ward.

She found Rosalind crying softly because a little toy dog which she had wound up refused to bark.

Polly looked it over. "It is out of order," she concluded. "That is the reason it does n't work."

Rosalind was thoughtful.

"Daddy does n't work on Sunday," she said. "Is he out of order?"

Polly was about to explain, when the little one wailed out, "I want my daddy! I want to see my daddy!" It was the first time she had shown any sign of homesickness.

For a moment Polly was at a loss for comforting words. She well knew that it would be a hard matter to persuade Mr. Wheatley to come up to the

house. She was spared from speaking, however, for Clementina and Benedicta walked in.

"What's the matter?" inquired the latter.

"I want — my daddy! — I want — my — dad-dy!" sobbed Rosalind.

"You poor little kid!" crooned Benedicta. And gently pushing Polly aside she sat on the edge of the bed and held the child close. "Poor little kid!"

The sobbing lessened, but still kept on.

"Now, see here!" began Benedicta in a coaxing tone, "you just be a good girl and stop crying, and pretty soon we'll have a regular superbondonjical time."

"I don't know what kind of a time that is — I guess I never had one." The mite was interested at once.

"Oh, it's lovely, amazin'ly lovely, a superbondonjical time is!" The voice was inspiring.

Rosalind smiled. "Will we have it now?" she asked.

"Just as soon as I can get it ready; I guess about the time you'll sit up to your little table in your little chair."

This was a wonderfully satisfying answer, and Rosalind closed her eyes with a breath of content. She was constantly looking forward to ten o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the afternoon, those being the hours when she was taken up for a short time and allowed to sit in the small chair

that "daddy" had made for her and to eat her luncheon or supper upon the pretty table which Grandpa Wheatley had fashioned to match the chair.

Benedicta held her a moment longer and then laid her tenderly upon her pillow.

The child opened her eyes and gazed up into the kind, homely face.

"You look like daddy," she said thoughtfully.

The housekeeper drew back with a start. "I — I must go see to — "

Nobody found out just what she was going to "see to," for she was gone.

Soon a sweet, spicy odor floated into the ward, which caused the little folks to sniff delightedly and to wonder among themselves what was in store for them.

It was not long before Benedicta and the "superbondonjical" luncheon came in. On the tray were freshly baked oatmeal macaroons, little cooky girls with wide skirts, and glasses of creamy milk.

Rosalind smiled up at the housekeeper, and said again, "You do look like daddy!"

This time, however, Benedicta did not run away. Instead, she responded, "Do I?" and went on to tell of a little girl that was lost and who was finally restored to her friends because of her likeness to one of her sisters.

Polly, musing over this, wondered what relation Benedicta bore to the Wheatley family. Perhaps

in time the truth would come out. It did come — and sooner than she had expected.

She awoke early one morning and went downstairs to find Benedicta in the midst of a big baking.

"Teeters and tongs!" ejaculated the housekeeper, "what in the universe are you up at five o'clock for? I calculated on havin' the kitchen to myself for two hours longer." She stood and viewed Polly dejectedly.

The girl laughed. "I'm going right away," she said. "I won't hinder you a minute. If I can help," she added, "I'll stay."

Benedicta shook her head, as Polly turned to the piazza door. "Hold on!" she called in a hushed tone: "I might as well stop now and tell you. The cookies are baked, the bread's goin' all right, and the pies are ready — wait a minute and I'll put the bread in." She came from the oven, laid her holder on the only empty corner of the table, and glanced around. "Huh," she muttered, "looks as if the Devil was havin' an auction!" Then she sat down.

"I s'pose you know all about Sereno Wheatley and me."

"No," answered Polly.

Benedicta looked at her with her eyes narrowed. "Do you mean to say, Miss Polly, that you haven't asked what anybody in town could communicate?"

"I have made no inquiries," Polly replied. "I thought if there was anything that you wished me to know you would tell me."

"Well, if you are n't the nicest! The idea of your not askin'! I s'posed you knew the whole story from A to Z. Dear me, I must tell it quick, for I've got lots of bakin' to do before breakfast.

"Sereno Wheatley is my half-brother. My mother married twice. Sereno was Wheatley's child and I was a Clapperton. He's considerable older'n I am, but we were always chummy, some way — we liked each other, or did till he got married. We all s'posed he was goin' to marry Isabel Lockwood, the prettiest girl in town; but if he did n't go to Boston an' get acquainted with Lily Starr, an' before we knew anything about it he brought her home — married! We never liked her, not one of us. My father would n't have 'em at home, so off they went, and I guess they had a hard time gettin' along. She was pretty enough, but she'd been brought up different from what he had, and I s'pose I kept comparin' her with Isabel Lockwood — Isabel was my chum. She died young. Lily was called a beauty, but she was n't a circumstance to Isabel. Anyway, she was a Democrat! That was enough for my father. But I d'n' know. It looks different now from what it did then. I — I guess it's partly that little Ferne kid an' partly you, Miss Polly — anyway, I feel somehow different.

"An' that makes me think of one thing more I've got to tell you. I did n't lie when I broke your car and said I ran into my Miss Flora and Mr. Aimé. I did, but I did n't make any remarks about what started my doin' it. Oscarlucy was takin' Rosalind to ride in her little cart — she was always peregrinatin' round with that kid — and I turned the corner an' come on them so sudden, I almost run 'em down! I was 'bout scared to death, and then I swung out so far I just scooted into my other folks! That's the truth and every mite I've got to confess. Well, I heard las' night that his wife's sick—it's a fever—and they can't get a soul to come an' help. So there they are, Sereno and that ten-year-old Oscarlucy. If she's like most children she's worse'n nobody, an' when it comes to nursin', a man ain't in it, no matter how good he is. So I've got to go! I said to myself 't I could n't, 't my place was here with you and the kids. And I went to bed. But then I got to thinkin' till I 'most jumped up an' started off. You see, I — well, I'd been prayin' the Lord to give me an opportunity to kind o' make up with Sereno, for I could n't just go walkin' in there after all these years and say, 'Brother Sereno and Sister Lily, I've come to be reconciled'! I could n't fire off such a thing at 'em, could I? Well, when it come to me that here was the opportunity I'd been prayin' for, I made up my mind I'd better get down there as quick as I could. But I was n't

goin' to leave you in the lurch! So I set my alarm-clock and got up at half-past three — "

"Why, Benedicta," broke in Polly, "you should n't have thought of me! I can cook — a little, and so can Lilith. We'll get along all right."

"Then you don't blame me for going?" The housekeeper eyed the girl keenly.

"Blame you!" Polly took the reddened hands in her own. "It is the very thing I want you to do. I am proud of you to know that you are ready to go — just when you are needed."

Benedicta shook her head slowly. "Thank you, Miss Polly. I'm goin' sure, though" — a flush stole over her face — "I'd rather be horse-whipped than to do it! Las' night, at first, I almost hoped you would n't let me off!"

"I know how you feel," returned Polly; "but when it is over with, you would n't have missed it for a farm. You'll be so glad. It will pay — if only for that."

Benedicta looked at Polly through a mist of tears. "It's just you and that little Ferne kid that's done it," she said. "You are so good!"

"Nonsense! I'm not good at all!"

Benedicta smiled as a tear ran down her cheek.

"I do hope, Miss Polly, that I'll get to heaven before you do — I shall be amazin'ly disappointed if I don't — for I'm countin' on bein' there when your crown is brought in. You'll look so astonished, for it'll be full of stars — bright ones,

too! — and you'll say, 'Oh, no, that is n't mine! That can't be for me! There must be some mistake!' Oh, I know just what you'll say, and it'll be such fun to hear you say it!"

CHAPTER XXIX

TROUBLE IN THE KITCHEN

THEY had been three days without Benedicta, and she was missed more than she could have been made to believe. Nothing seemed the same. Even the mountain was apparently farther removed from the world of people and homes and all that goes to make life the joy it can be. The food question had not troubled any of them very much, for the housekeeper's latest baking was not yet exhausted. It was so much diminished, however, that Polly and Lilith had held converse at least twice on the subject, ending with, "Well, we'll get along some way." The children were easy, milk being their chief diet; but Mrs. Daybill and Dr. Abbe — ! Both Polly and Lilith shook their heads over these two.

Three more days passed, and still Mrs. Wheatley was too ill to admit of Benedicta's return to Sunrise Chalet. Grocer Jack brought word that she would come back and "cook up a lot of victuals" as soon as she could be spared, but she did not know when that would be.

"I'm going to make some cookies," declared Polly. "The children must be longing for them, though they're good not to tease. You know I did make some once with Benedicta's help."

"Yes, and they were delicious," said Lilith. "You can use Benedicta's recipe if you have forgotten just how."

"Oh, she had n't any! I did n't think of that."

"Those are simple. Can't you manage them without a recipe?"

Polly wagged her head doubtfully. "I think cookies are rather hard to make and have them come out just right. I can try, though maybe I shall have to eat them all myself."

"I'll help if the batch is spoiled," laughed Lilith. "It is the bread question that is worrying me. I am so tired of baker's bread. Perhaps I had better try some muffins first; they don't take any time to make. Dear me, I did n't dream that baking was such a bother. If only Benedicta had recipes for such things; but she takes a little of this and a little of that — and it's done!"

Polly's cookies were hard enough — so she herself averred — to break the children's teeth into flinders.

"I believe I could play ball with them against the garage, and they would n't crack," she declared disgustedly. "I'm going over to Mrs. Swan's to see if she has a cooky recipe. Wonder why I did n't think of it before."

She tried again the next day, and this time the little cakes could not be accused of hardness; they were so rich and crumbly that they came from the pan in pieces.

"Anyway, they taste good," comforted Lilith. "I wish my muffins had come out as well as these."

Poor Lilith! the muffins that she had risen early to make for breakfast had been so heavy and unpalatable that they were fed to the chickens and ducks.

In vain the girls coaxed Mrs. Daybill to try her "luck," but she asserted that she never could do anything without a recipe and that she was n't going to waste time in trying.

"If I had dreamed that I'd need it I would have brought my recipe book along."

"Better send for it," advised Polly.

"By that time Benedicta would be back," the other returned.

"I am going to Overlook this afternoon to buy one," declared Polly. But, to her chagrin, among her numerous purchases it was forgotten.

Meanwhile Lilith grew desperate, and, borrowing a recipe from Sally Robinson, made some rolls for tea.

"Dr. Abbe says they are the best he ever ate," she told Polly, a new flush on her cheeks.

For several days Polly had noticed that Lilith had been repeating this and that which "Dr. Abbe said." It was unusual for Lilith. Now Polly smiled across into her friend's eyes, and the blush on her cheeks grew deep. That night, at bedtime, she knocked on Polly's door.

"I saw your light," she apologized; "may I

come in?" Yet when the door was shut behind her she hesitated, her eyes downcast, the color fluttering in her cheeks.

Polly drew her down to the couch. "Tell me," she encouraged. "Is it some good news?"

"Have you guessed?" Lilith's happy eyes looked up in surprise.

"Dr. Abbe?" smiled Polly.

The other nodded, blushing deliciously. "I have n't told anybody but mother. I wanted you to know. He says — this is n't going to — to hurt you, Polly?"

"Bless you, no!" Polly caught the pink face between her palms and kissed the sweet mouth. "I'm so glad, Lilith. I can't tell you how glad. It is what I have wanted for a good while."

"But listen! He says he liked me from the first, but that he did n't suppose I'd ever care a rap for him, and he says one day you happened to say something about me — I guess praised me up a little — you know, as you do sometimes — and it made him wonder if I ever could care. It was after that he asked me to go to Skyboro with him — the day of the thunder-storm — and since then he has come in my way more or less. Still, I did n't think he was in earnest. I thought all the time that he was in love with you."

"I'm glad you are mistaken," said Polly.

"So am I," confessed Lilith, "if you don't care for him. I should n't be happy a bit if you did."

Polly lay awake long after she had put out her light, thinking, thinking. Things with Lilith had gone just as she wanted them to go. If she could only know how David felt! Would he wish to hold her to a promise she had never made? She fell asleep and dreamed that she was being married to him, under an arch of sunflowers! She awoke with a shiver, unutterably thankful that it was a dream.

The next morning a messenger rode up from Overlook with a special-delivery letter for Polly.

She glanced at the envelope, and a frightened look flashed into her face. Upstairs she darted. A few minutes later she sought Lilith — her ready refuge.

"Come right into my room and try to think what we can do!" she demanded.

"What is it?" Lilith was plainly startled as she followed Polly.

"It's awful!" exclaimed Polly in a hushed voice. "Sardis Merrifield wants to come here and spend his vacation, — two weeks!"

"Goodness! Sardis Merrifield!" Lilith sank back in her rocker, limp with the overpowering news.

"And think of my cookies!" Polly laughed hysterically.

Lilith shook her head in despair. "We can't have him! Did he telegraph?"

"No — special-delivery. He says that unex-

pectedly he is to have his vacation now, and he asks if it will be convenient for him to come."

"Tell him no!"

"But how can I refuse — there's Dolly!"

Lilith scowled savagely. "I feel like swearing."

Polly broke into a laugh.

"Don't!" Lilith was almost in tears.

"I'd cry if 't would help us out, but it won't. If I ever stay home long enough I'll learn to cook. Mother knows every twist and turn of cookery — why did n't I have her teach me!"

"Same here!" Lilith jerked out. "There's no sense in a girl's not knowing how to make bread and roast meat and all that. See how I spoiled the dinner this noon! I was so mortified it choked me — I could n't eat."

"It was n't so bad," fibbed Polly sympathetically.

"I know! I've eaten Benedicta's pot roasts. It was horribly burned."

"Well, this is n't getting us anywhere," said Polly.

"If only we could see Benedicta coming up the road! That's the way it would happen in a story."

"It won't happen in our story," retorted Polly with a little laugh. "I'm sorry enough to cry for poor Dolly — we must n't ever let her know — but I will write to Sardis M. that he can't come till Benedicta gets home."

"Polly, you must n't!"

"You told me to. And what else is there to do? We can't ask him to come and eat such stuff as we've been having for the last day or two."

"No," agreed Lilith with a doleful sigh.

They carried the letter to Overlook that afternoon, and received an answer on the second day thereafter. Polly opened it behind closed doors, only Lilith looking on.

"Oh!" she gasped; but Lilith could not tell whether it was of relief or dismay.

She caught the sheet as Polly tossed it over to her, and read: —

DEAR MISS DUDLEY: I cannot leave you in such a dilemma. I will bring up a new cook to-morrow. Then if you don't want me to stay, I'll go.

With love for Dorothy

Faithfully yours

SARDIS MERRIFIELD

"Some of those country women," said Lilith. "I'm afraid she won't suit Dr. Abbe — he's dreadfully finicky."

"Country women generally know how to cook," returned Polly. "Anyway, it won't be our lookout if she does n't."

"Maybe it's the girl he boards with," suggested Dolly a while later.

"Does he board with a girl?" laughed Polly. The laugh did not sound true.

"No," answered Dolly, "it's the girl's mother

that keeps him, but he says the girl makes beautiful things to eat."

"She's probably the one," agreed Lilith.

Polly jumped up and ran to see if the blackberries on the stove were burning.

CHAPTER XXX

THE NEW COOK

IT was nearly four o'clock when Sardis arrived. The family were on the veranda, each curious to see the cook whom the young man was to bring. As he appeared alone at the big birch-tree they gave him scant notice, their eyes passing from him to the place beyond where the new cook would first come into view. They watched in vain.

"She probably rode," whispered Lilith to Polly; "but why did n't he ride up with her?"

"I bet she would n't come!" piped Clementina.

"It would be a joke if she left him in the lurch," smiled Mrs. Daybill.

Polly stepped forward to greet the visitor, and Dr. Abbe lifting Dolly in his arms went down the steps, saying, "Here is a young lady who 'can't wait to kiss Sardis.'"

There was a general laugh, and then Clementina got in her word. "Where's the new cook?"

"She will be here presently, — as soon as I get washed up."

Polly's heart "went down cellar," as later she told Lilith.

After a little non-essential talk Sardis Merrifield walked over to the Study with Dr. Abbe.

Lilith drew Polly inside and thence to the kitchen. "What does it mean?" she began. "Not that the minister — ?"

"Yes," frowned Polly. "Every boy who has fried bacon or made coffee at a camp thinks he is an accomplished cook." She looked round the spotless kitchen over which she and Lilith had spent the greater share of the forenoon, and sighed. If only Benedicta would pop in and save the day!

"I'm glad I blacked the stove," reflected Lilith. "I thought first I'd leave it for the new cook!"

"He'll never know whether it is black or red," scorned Polly. "In some respects men are all alike."

Nevertheless, the man that walked into the kitchen, unannounced, a few moments later did look different from any other that Polly had ever known. Very trim he was in his short white coat, a chef's cap hiding his thick brown hair. His face wore the expression of one in love with his rôle.

"At your service, mademoiselle," he said with a low bow.

Lilith peeped in from the back piazza, then swiftly stole away with a silent chuckle. It was too funny! Could he really cook?

"If you will allow me," began the newcomer, "I should like to look round a bit, so that I may learn where things are. Or perhaps you will be good enough to show me."

"Now, Mr. Merrifield," began Polly, "you

need n't think you must do this to help out. We can get along. The truth is, Miss Brooks and I don't know much about cooking, and we were afraid you would n't like it very well; but if you can put up with — "

His hand stayed her apologies. "Miss Dudley," he said, "I have come here to cook, and I don't like to give up a job until I have had a chance at it. Then if I don't suit you, I will get out as quick and gracefully as I can." He looked at her with mischievous eyes.

She laughed. "I suppose I'll have to let you," she replied, "and Lilith and I will help all we can."

"I think I shall not need any help," he smiled. "I will agree to take care of the kitchen."

"All but the dishes, then," yielded Polly.

"I always wash my own dishes," he returned, with eyes that twinkled.

"You talk as if you were used to kitchen work," laughed Polly.

"I am."

The girl looked incredulous, but said nothing. At once she began opening doors of pantry and storeroom and cupboards.

"Everything appears to be very convenient," he approved, as he examined the large ice-chest in the corner of the storeroom.

"We think so," was the response. "Mrs. Gresham spared no money in remodeling this part of the house."

The talk passed to the donator's beneficence, until, finally, they came back to the kitchen, where the clock told them that tea-time was not far away.

The new cook at once began preparations for the meal, and in the short time that Polly remained she had to admit to herself that here was no green hand, and she left the room with a relief that she had not known since Benedicta's departure.

That first tea will always remain in the memory of those that sat at the table with Sardis Merrifield. Bouillon, deliciously seasoned; small rolls — hot, light, tender, and crusted — as rolls should be; salad served on individual dishes, lettuce leaves beneath and sprays of parsley atop; a layer cake with filling of peaches and whipped cream; — that was all, but no one who shared the meal felt any lack.

"Where did he get that salad dressing," queried Lilith of Polly, while the new cook was washing the dishes. "There was n't a drop in the pantry, and he surely had n't time to make it; yet there it was, exactly in the middle of each slice of tomato — and was n't it good!"

"It was good, and he made the dressing," answered Polly.

"How do you know?" queried Lilith in surprise.

"I asked him when I went out to offer my services as dish-wiper," replied Polly. "Do you know what was in that salad?"

"No, I could n't quite make out — tomatoes and cabbage for two things."

"And macaroni!"

"I thought of that, but I could n't believe it was."

"He found some in the refrigerator, so he chopped some cabbage to go with it; he says he often puts them together."

"And was n't it arranged prettily? Where in the world did he learn to do those things?"

Polly shook her head. "I am going to find out."

Two days afterward she came upon the new cook in the kitchen scanning a small volume.

"I am hunting for a pudding recipe," he told her.

"It is an imposition for us to let you do all this work," she said apologetically.

"No, indeed," he replied; "it is a real pleasure. Besides, I was falling out of practice. I ought to remember how to make this pudding without consulting a recipe."

Polly looked at him curiously. "You talk — and cook — as if you were a professional," she laughed.

"I am. This is the first summer for five years that I have not been concocting dishes for the table. I cooked my way through college, first at the commons, then at a New York restaurant. Finally a Yale boy rescued me, and for three summers I was chef at his father's home up the Hudson."

"Is n't that fine!" exclaimed Polly, her eyes shining.

"Some people don't see it that way," smiled the young man.

"Why not?" Polly returned in an astonished tone. "I think it is splendid to work one's way through college; but I never should have thought of cooking."

"It pays pretty well, and it was the money I was looking for," he laughed.

"I knew a boy who took care of furnaces; but cooking is ever so much better. And you do know how to cook!" Polly wagged her head in approval.

"It is well you think so," he replied; "seeing you have to eat the cooking."

"By the way," he went on, "my sub-conscious mind has just notified me of a neglected duty. While you were down in Overlook this forenoon Mr. Wheatley came to see his little granddaughter. He rode up with the grocer."

"Oh, did he!" cried Polly. "Rosalind must have been delighted."

"Yes, but you should have seen her grandfather. He was almost beside himself to find how much she had improved. Is she really expected to walk at the end of two years?"

"Father thinks she will."

There was a moment of tense silence.

Then the man asked, in lowered tone, "Has

Dr. Dudley ever said whether there was any chance for Dorothy?"

This was what Polly had dreaded the first time he was at Overlook; but he had not asked the question. Now it had come. She could not bear to hurt him. Her eyes misted, and she looked away.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "he told me that before he saw her he thought there might be help; afterwards — "

A tear escaped its bound, and her hand sought to hide it.

"Of course, it could n't be," he said quickly. "I did n't need to ask."

"Oh, why must there be such hard things in the world!" broke out Polly impulsively.

"Even as it is, she is happier than most children."

"I know, still—" She did not go on; and he spoke brightly.

"Little Miss Rosalind Ferne told me to-day that I was extravagant."

"Extravagant!" Polly's forehead wrinkled in perplexity.

"She asked me what I was going to have for dinner, and I told her I intended to fricassee three chickens. 'Dear me!' she said, 'fricassee means all cut up, does n't it?' I told her it did. 'Well,' she replied, 'I'm sorry, for I do like to see a bird on the table, and I think you're pretty extravagant with your ammunition.'"

Polly laughed. "She does make droll speeches."

"Yes, she has strange thoughts. This morning I overheard the children talking, and Rosalind said, 'What pretty hills those are—the 'way-off ones! I wish I knew who made them.' Dorothy spoke up. 'Why, Rosalind, don't you know? God made them.' — 'Who made the sunshine?' — 'God made it,' Dorothy answered. — 'Who made the stars?' went on Rosalind. — 'God. He made everything. He made the whole world.' For a moment Rosalind was silent; then she asked, in quite a now-I've-got-you tone, 'Well, who made God?' But Dorothy was ready. 'Nobody made Him,' she replied. 'He has lived always. There never was a time when He did n't live.' They were quiet for a little. Then Rosalind responded in a rather weary tone, 'My, He must be healthy!'

"I thought they'd laugh; but not a sound! So I peeped in. There they sat, solemn as little owls. Nobody had seen anything funny about that!"

The days flew swiftly over Sunrise Chalet. Sardis Merrifield had been cook in the commodious kitchen for more than a week and had treated the family to an astonishing variety of fancy dishes and plain. At first the White Nurse had worried for fear the children were having too rich food; but the cook assured her that the richness was mostly in the unfamiliar names, and as nobody became ill, she soon settled down, with everybody else, to the enjoyment of the novel viands with which the table greeted them, meal after meal.

Early one afternoon Benedicta appeared at the kitchen door with Grocer Jack, and the welcome that she received would have turned any head which was not as well-balanced as hers.

"Well, now stop talkin', all of you," she laughed finally, "and leave me the kitchen to myself! I can't concoct cookies or doughnuts to such a tintinnabulation as this!"

"But you don't need to," cried Lilith. "Mr. Merrifield keeps us beautifully cooked up."

"Oh!" scoffed Benedicta, turning merry eyes towards the minister, "I know what a man's cooking is — I've had it! It's bacon and eggs, bacon and eggs, ham and griddles, and bacon and eggs — that's what it is! I warrant you have n't got a cooky or a doughnut in the house — have you, now?" Her challenging eyes swept the group.

"Show her into the storeroom, Merrifield!" laughed Dr. Abbe.

"There's Fruit Wheels and Buttercups!" piped Clementina.

"Parrots and pans! what hifalutings are those?"

"Oh, they're little — " began the child; but two of her audience were disappearing in the hallway that led to the storeroom and she speeded after.

"Well, I don't see's I'm a requisite here," laughed Benedicta as she returned to the kitchen. "Such things for a man to make!"

"We had White Monkey for supper," Clementina informed her; "but they would n't let me

have any. And then they ate it all up!" she ended plaintively.

"'White Monkey'!" repeated the housekeeper in a shocked tone.

"Just a cheese dish," explained Lilith.

Polly threw her arm around Benedicta's waist. "When are you coming back to stay?" she asked.

The woman looked at her tenderly.

"When you want me?" she queried.

"As soon as you can come. We've been lost without you."

"Huh, looks like it!" she returned. Nevertheless, Polly knew that she was pleased. "When's your French cook goin'?" with a nod in the direction of Sardis.

"He says he can't be away beyond his two weeks."

"I've got to stay with my sister over Sunday," was the reply, the word so unfamiliar to her lips slipping out smoothly. "After that, Sereno thinks he and Oscarlucy can get along. My, it's amaz-in'ly marvelous the things that ten-year-old kid can do — and do as well as I could. She's an extraordinary wonder. But, then, she has a mighty smart grandfather and grandmother. Why, that house was like waxwork when I got there, the patient all fixed up in bed as nice as you please. I d'n' know what I'd 'a' done without Oscarlucy when she was so sick. But the doctor says she'll be all right in a little while — There! I forgot! I

sh'd think I was losin' my mind! Where's my bag? Oh, thanks! There's a letter to pay you for it," handing the thick missive across Clementina's head to Sardis Merrifield. "I thought I might as well bring up all the mail there was, seein' I was comin'."

. She handed out the letters and papers, and then went upstairs with the girls.

The children were in bed, Lilith and Dr. Abbe had gone for a moonlight walk, Benedicta had "stepped down" to see "Young Ben," Mrs. Daybill was sewing, and Polly was alone on the veranda, when Sardis came across from the Study.

"Want to walk about on 'Top o' the World' a few minutes?" he smiled.

Polly ran down to him, and they went up the road together.

"I'd like a little advice," he began.

"I'm afraid I shall not be very wise at that," she returned; "but I will do my best."

"Suppose we go to the point at once," he said; "then we will see. The letter that Benedicta brought me was from a New York friend. He is a Yale man and one of a number from the University that are planning what will doubtless be of untold benefit to one of the worst sections of the city. They have acquired the land already, sufficient for their purpose. The scheme is to put up a few buildings at first and if successful to add to them as needed. They are planning a church, a school,

a homey hotel for young women, a lodging-house and restaurant for men and boys, a club-house with gymnasium, and so on. They want me to help."

"To be pastor of the church?" questioned Polly eagerly.

"If they can get a congregation," he nodded. "It would be my ideal life," he went on; "though it would not be easy. For myself I should not mind the hardness, or the discouragement — which must be expected; but" — for an instant he paused — "if I should wish to marry, a woman well might hesitate to share the responsibilities of such a future."

"Why?" asked Polly in a surprised tone. "You cannot know girls very well, if you think they must have velvet cushions and paths of roses."

"You are right," he responded; "I have known but few girls in all my life. Still, I am very sure that those — nearly all, at least — would not be attracted by the great opportunities, they would not be willing to make the sacrifice."

Polly shook her head. "I think it is just the work that the right kind of woman would like. Take my mother, for instance — you know she used to be a nurse before her marriage — why, she could n't be contented a day if she were not helping somebody somewhere. A life of pleasure cannot satisfy the earnest, thoughtful girl of to-day. She craves her share of the world's work, she wants to

see some little spot grow better and happier under her hands."

"Then, you would advise me to accept the offer?"

"I should think you would not hesitate one moment, since you are sure that it is just what you would like best."

"Thank you; I wanted your opinion. This proposal is not wholly unexpected. Last spring Waite practically said that they should want me as soon as the church was finished; but the word came earlier than I looked for it. The building will not be ready before next summer, and I have one more year of study in New Haven."

The talk fell to other matters, and they walked on and on until they were near the bungalows on the other part of the mountain. A girl came out from the Robinson house, and Polly recognized Sally.

"I thought it was you," she said as they met. "Father has just come up from Overlook and brought your mail with ours. I was going to run over with it."

"Oh, a letter and paper from mother!" cried Polly joyfully, scanning the superscriptions by the light of the moon. "Thank you. Benedicta brought some mail this afternoon, but nothing for me. I always miss mother's letters if they don't come on the regular days."

The others were on the veranda when they re-

turned, and Polly excused herself to read her letter. Upstairs, standing by the lamp, she tore open the envelope.

As she read, her eyes widened and she dropped limply into the nearest chair. She reached for the newspaper which had slipped to the floor and slitted the wrapper with unsteady fingers. Glancing hurriedly over it her eyes rested on a marked paragraph near the middle of the third page. Quickly she read it through, and then read it again. She was still sitting there when she heard footfalls on the stairs.

"Lilith!" she called, and the girl came in.

Polly thrust the paper towards her, pointing to the article.

Lilith glanced at Polly first and was startled at her face. It was colorless with a dazed expression; but it told of neither grief nor trouble. Her eyes came back to the printed page, and she read: —

Mrs. Marion Winifred Stuart, of Richmond, Virginia, announces the engagement of her daughter, Valorie Lynde Stuart, to Mr. David Gresham Collins, son of Mrs. Eva Gresham Collins, and grandnephew of David Gresham, of Fair Harbor, Connecticut.

Polly smiled.

"Do-don't you — care?" whispered Lilith.

"I want to shout 'Halleluiah!' at the top of my voice!"

"Polly Dudley!"

"I do! I feel so deliciously light — I may fly away!"

Lilith looked into the sparkling eyes and believed her.

Polly went to bed; but sleep did not come. That first exaltation had passed and left her heart quivering and sad. She reviewed her talk with Sardis. Why had he sought her opinion? What was it to him? Questions clamored for answers. Why should her path always lead through such tangles? There was Lilith — she had come up to Overlook, heart-free, untroubled; now she was radiantly happy with her new-found lover. Patricia had had a little bitterness which lasted only long enough to make the joy that had followed it seem the sweeter. She was not envious of her friends — oh, no, not in the least degree. She rejoiced in their gladness; yet she could not resist comparing her way with theirs. During the later years they had been together David was but an unsatisfactory lover. She had felt trammeled by his watchful, jealous eyes. Their love, if love it had really been, looked now but the shadow of the joyousness which she realized love might be. And only within a few hours she had practically told Sardis Merrifield that the really greatest happiness the right kind of woman could have was in her labor for others! What a hypocrite she was! When her heart was yearning, not for increased opportunity for work, but for the love that was not for

her! She scorned, she despised herself, and yet this new emotion was something beyond her power. Hours dragged by with thoughts like these racing through her brain. Finally weariness overcame her and she slept.

It was late when she awoke. She rose and dressed quickly, suddenly remembering that she was to take Benedicta down to Overlook and had planned to start early.

Sardis was hanging up the dishpans as Polly came into the kitchen.

"Suppose you ride down to Overlook with us," she said. "I'm going to take two or three of the children, and Dolly will enjoy it better if you are with her."

"Thank you," he smiled; "I shall be glad to go. I need some supplies, and the grocer won't be here until to-morrow; so I was thinking I'd beg your car and run down and get them. This makes it all right."

"I did n't know you could drive," Polly looked surprised.

"Yes. I learned last summer. The car was a Grant Six, similar to yours. I have not touched one this year, but I think I have not forgotten."

"Then you don't need me, and you can take more children."

He looked at her earnestly, almost questioningly. For an instant Polly was afraid that he was offended at her suggestion.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I do need you — I think I have always needed you. I only wish that you needed me."

He was still looking steadily across the corner of the kitchen table into the brown eyes. They widened a bit with astonishment, and then flashed with incredulous joy. Her cheeks paled and flushed.

She had the poise of a startled bird just ready to take wing.

"Miss Dudley, do you — need me? Do you?" He bent towards her, and involuntarily she drew back.

"No, don't!" he pleaded. "I'm not coming — unless you want me."

Her lips moved, but with no word. She looked up into his eyes, a sweet, tremulous smile on the lips that would not speak.

"Bless you, little girl!" he breathed, and took a quick step round the table.

"Teeters and tongs!" ejaculated Benedicta from the back piazza, "what in the universe are you doin'? Ain't you ready yet? I've been sittin' there in the chariot for an hour or less. I thought we were goin' to Overlook!"

"Yes, Benedicta, I'll be out in a minute!" Polly's lips had spoken.

There was a knock, and then the inner door crept open, Lilith calling out, "Anybody here? — Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"What is it, Lilith?" Polly said hurriedly. She flung the door wide.

"I thought there was nobody there," she apologized. "I was afraid you were waiting. The children are all ready."

"I was asking Mr. Merrifield to go with us, and just found out that he could drive," explained Polly, somewhat lamely, as the girls went upstairs together.

"Say, Miss Polly," called Benedicta.

Polly came to the head of the flight.

"Do you mind if I drive the chariot down? I was dyin' to get my hands on that wheel, and I've been holdin' 'em on it for the longest time, waitin' for you folks. It did feel amazin'ly rapturous."

"Why, certainly you can drive," Polly assured her.

"Just as lief as not?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Surely, Benedicta, and I'll be down directly."

"How lovely you look!" beamed Lilith innocently. "Your eyes are even brighter than they were last night. I wish David Collins had got engaged a year ago if it is going to make you look this way."

"Thank you," replied Polly. "I am glad he is all right; now I can be happy with a clear conscience."

The horn was honking as they went out. "Hurry up!" called Benedicta. "We shan't arrive till noon."

"Miss Polly is going to walk down with me," Sardis Merrifield answered.

"Teeters and tongs!" she replied, "you'll be totally exhausted by the time you reach the foot."

"Oh, no," laughed Polly, "one could n't be tired. Look over there — fringes of purple and gold as far as you can see! It is a royal road to Overlook to-day."

"Teeters and tongs!" floated out to them as the doors clicked together. "'Course it's a 'royal road' . . . but 't ain't the goldenrod and asters! . . . God bless 'em!"

THE END

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